PASCAL

VISCOUNT ST. CYRES

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PASCAL

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Blaise Pascal

From a portrait in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

PASCAL

BY

VISCOUNT ST. CYRES

FORMERLY SENIOR STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH
AUTHOR OF 'FRANÇOIS DE FÉNELON'

WITH A PORTRAIT

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PREFACE

A FEW years ago I had the good fortune to be introduced to a lady, who told me she heard that I was very clever, and wrote books. I pleaded guilty to the second half of her indictment. She asked what kind of books I wrote. I answered that I was thinking of writing something on Pascal. She inquired what that was. I explained that it was a man. She asked if he was alive now. I told her that he was an eminent Frenchman, who had been dead about two hundred and fifty years. A look of sudden interest came into her face, and she begged me to tell her how on earth I ever came to hear of him. This book is an attempt to answer her question. I have tried to bring together all such facts in Pascal's life as are likely to be of interest to an English reader. I have, indeed, skated lightly over his geometrical performances, for reasons of which my own mathematical incompetence is only one; and I have cut as short as possible the technical detail of his quarrels with the Church of Rome. On the other hand, I have described at some length the more dramatic sides of his scientific career; and I have given a good deal of space to the so-called 'worldly period,' when he consorted with

précieuses and free-thinkers in the drawing-rooms of Paris. Neither the 'Great Experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme' nor the friendship with the Chevalier de Méré were mere episodes in his career; the 'Provincial Letters' and the 'Pensées' could only have been written by a scientific man who had also had considerable experience of the world of fashion. Lastly, I have done my best to profit by the wisdom of Professors William James and Leuba, and to deal with Pascal's conversion and its consequences as a 'variety of religious experience.' Some small portion of my debt to earlier writers I have endeavoured to discharge by giving a classified list of the books I have found most useful; and I have added a short chronological table of the chief events of Pascal's life, viewed in relation to the general history of his time.

ST. CYRES.

October 1909.

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COMPARATIVE TABLE OF THE CHIEF EVENTS IN PASCAL'S LIFE, VIEWED IN RELATION TO THE GENERAL HISTORY OF FRANCE

Pascal's Life	Political History	Church History	Science	Literature
1623–1631. Pascal lives with his family at Clermont.	1618–1648. The Thirty Years' War. 1624, Richelieu becomes Prime Minister to Louis XIII. He crushes the Huguenots at La Rochelle (1628). Abroad he consistently supports all enemies of the House of Hapsburg, whether in the Empire or Spain.	Age of St. Vincent de Paul. He founds the Lazarists (1624), the Sisters of Charity (1634). 1627. Bossuet born.	1626. Francis Bacon dies. Huygens born (1629).	1621, La Fontaine born; 1622 Molière born. Beginnings of Corneille.
1631–1640. The Pascals settled in Paris. In 1638 Stephen is forced to fly to Clermont, but Jacqueline acts before Richelieu, and obtains her father's pardon. Meanwhile her brother is at work on Conic Sections.	1638. Richelieu's foreign policy involves a heavy drain on the financial resources of France. Many complaints against the taxes; revolt of the *Va-nus-pieds* in Normandy. Richelieu makes an example of Rouen.	1636. Saint Cyran becomes chief confessor of Port Royal. 1638. Death of Jansen. Saint Cyran imprisoned as a religious innovator.	1633. The Inquisition condemns Galileo. 1637. Descartes writes the Discourse on Method. Rise of Fermat and Roberval.	1632, Spinoza born; 1636, Boileau born; 1638, Malebranche born; 1639, Racine born. 1636, Corneille's 'Cid'; 1640, 'Horace,' 'Cinna.'
1640–1647. The Pascals at Rouen. Pascal sets to work on his Arithmetical Machine, and dedicates it to the Lord Chancellor (1645). In 1646 Stephen dislocates his thigh; La Boutellerie and Des Landes convert the whole family to Jansenism. In the autumn Pierre Petit arrives with news of the vacuum. In the spring of 1647 Pascal denounces Saint Ange; in the summer his health breaks down, and he is ordered to Paris.	1642. Richelieu dies. He is followed by Mazarin. 1643, Louis XIII dies. Anne of Austria becomes Regent for Louis XIV, a child of five. Mazarin continues the anti-Hapsburg policy of Richelieu. Rise of Condé and Turenne; battles of Rocroi (1643) and Nordlingen (1645). Peace of Westphalia (1648).	1643. Release and death of Saint Cyran. Antoine Arnauld writes on Frequent Communion.	1642, Galileo dies; 1643, Isaac Newton born; 1646, Leibniz born; rise of Torricelli, who dies young in 1647. Mersenne dies (1648).	1644, Mme. de Sévigné starts writing letters; 1646, Molière forms a touring company. La Bruyère born.
1647–1649. Pascal in Paris. He meets Descartes, and does battle with Father Noel. In November he commissions Périer to make the Great Experiment. This is carried out in September 1648. Meanwhile Stephen has resigned his position at Rouen, and joined his children in Paris. He refuses to let Jacqueline become a nun at Port Royal.	1648–1653. The Fronde. Princes, Judges, and Paris mob unite to demand the abandonment of Richelieu's centralised system of government. Mazarin bows to the storm; the Princes then demand the banishment of Mazarin himself. He twice left the country, and was twice recalled, the second time in triumph (1653).			

COMPARATIVE TABLE—*continued.*

Pascal's Life	Political History	Church History	Science	Literature
1649–1650. Pascal goes with his family to Clermont.		1649. The Sorbonne condemns five propositions from the Augustinus.		
1650. Pascal comes back to Paris. He makes acquaintance with Roannez, and goes out into society, but works intermittently at the equilibrium of liquids. In 1651 Stephen dies; early in 1652 Jacqueline enters Port Royal.			1650. Descartes dies. Age of Guericke, Huygens, and Robert Boyle.	1651, Fénelon born; 1652, Bossuet begins preaching at Metz.
1652–1654. Pascal's worldly period. He makes acquaintance with Méré and Miton, raises difficulties about Jacqueline's 'dowry,' and writes on the Passion of Love. Latterly, however, he busies himself much with mathematical probability and the theory of numbers.		1653. Innocent X confirms the censure on Jansen.		
1654–1656. The Second Conversion. Pascal renounces science, and spends much of his time at Port Royal.	1654–1659. Mazarin carries on the war against Spain. Turenne campaigns in the Low Countries. Peace of the Pyrenees (1659).	1655. Arnauld impeached before the Sorbonne. 1656. Arnauld condemned by the Sorbonne; Alexander VII confirms the condemnation of Jansen. The Rectors of Paris denounce the Casuists.		
1656–1657. The Provincial Letters. Just after the Fifth Letter comes the miracle of the Holy Thorn; in the autumn Pascal corresponds with Charlotte de Roannez. In 1657 he writes the last two Letters, and the Letter of a Barrister on the Inquisition.		1657. Pirot publishes his 'Apology for the Casuists.'		
1658–1659. A short return to science. After denouncing Pirot's 'Apology for the Casuists,' Pascal starts the competition on the Cycloid.		1658. Pirot generally reprobated.		
1659–1662. 'The Apology for Christianity.' Final breakdown of his health. Death of Jacqueline (1661); his own death (1662).	1660. Louis XIV marries Maria Teresa of Spain; Mazarin dies (1661), leaving Louis to be his own prime minister.	1660. Louis XIV urges the Assembly of the Clergy to take strong measures for the extermination of Jansenism. The Formulary is imposed on the nuns of Port Royal (1661).		1659. Molière's 'Précieuses Ridicules'; La Rochefoucauld at work on his 'Maxims,' and Boileau on his 'Satires.' Bossuet begins preaching in Paris.

PASCAL

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

Blaise Pascal was born on June 17, 1623, at Clermont Ferrand in Auvergne. Like so many of his great contemporaries—Descartes, Corneille, Bossuet, Malebranche, Racine—he sprang from the well-to-do professional class; for generations one Pascal after another had audited the accounts of his province, or laid down the law from the Clermont Bench. His father, Stephen Pascal, chose the latter walk in life; he was vice-president of the Clermont *Cour des Comptes*, or Court of Exchequer. But Stephen was not the man to let his energies be bounded by the four walls of his court-house. He was a considerable mathematician and a character singularly upright, worthy in every way to be the father of his son. Of his wife, Antoinette Begon, little is known beyond a family tradition that she was very pious and clever, and anything but superstitious. She died when her only son was three years old, also leaving behind her two little daughters, Gilberte, born in 1620, and Jacqueline, born in 1625.

From his mother Blaise inherited a feeble constitution. Most of his short life was passed in the clutches of a wasting disease, to which contemporaries could give no name, though it would nowadays be diagnosed as neurasthenia.

A little memoir of his life, written by his sister Gilberte, abounds in distressing details showing how much her brother's illness kept him apart from other men. Even in his infancy it gave rise to an incident that assuredly left its mark on so great an enthusiast for the supernatural. When about twelve months old, he sank into a mysterious decline beyond the skill of Clermont doctors to cure. Popular imagination—excited by the same epidemic of belief in witchcraft that had just swept through the England of James I—promptly set him down as 'overlooked,' and fixed on an old pensioner of his mother as the culprit. At first his parents laughed at the story; but, as the child went from bad to worse, they became readier to catch at straws. Eventually Stephen summoned the old woman before him, and put her through a searching cross-examination. She ended by admitting that she had cast a spell on the child, adding that the charm could only be broken, if life were given for life. Stephen, now thoroughly unmanned, asked what kind of life was necessary. The witch answered that a cat would do. A cat was accordingly procured, and thrown out of the window. The witch then made a plaster of herbs, and laid it on the child. He sank immediately into a trance, from which he awoke at midnight perfectly recovered.

French critics cannot forgive the judge his share in this strange business. We Englishmen can be more merciful, remembering Sir Matthew Hale. Anyhow, Stephen made amends by giving up his life to his offspring. On his wife's death he sold his judgeship, and took his children to Paris; for this widower of forty meant to bring them up on a system of his own, and would not risk the interference of grandmothers and aunts at Clermont. The exact date of his departure was fixed by an engagement curiously prophetic. Stephen was to join a deputation from Clermont in petitioning the Crown not to allow a Jesuit school to be opened in

that loyal city. For the Jesuits had made themselves obnoxious to good Frenchmen by ostentatiously maintaining the thesis that kings might be deposed by the Pope, which was only a theological way of saying that the interests of Rome ought to take precedence, whenever they clashed with the interests of France.

The end of 1631 found the whole party settled in Paris, and Stephen free to take the whole education of his son into his own hands. Whether he did wisely has often been doubted. Certainly experience at large is against education by a father; what between the rival attractions of parental indulgence and parental ambition, it is felt that the natural equilibrium of things has small chance of coming into play. Montaigne's vague, shiftless upbringing is a witness to one side of the danger, as the familiar case of John Stuart Mill most glaringly exemplifies the other. Blaise was more fortunate than either of these. For indolence there was no place in the stirring neighbourhood of his father; while again, that father was much too human to think that starving every natural affection was the best way of forcing on the intellect. Where James Mill only saw a mind, Stephen saw a son of flesh and blood. He was in no danger of pushing on too fast. His first thought was to save his delicate boy all he had suffered in his own youth from stupid and unreasonable masters—Pharaohs who expected many bricks, and dealt out but little straw. Perhaps he forgot that even the worst schools have their compensations, in that nothing can take the place of an education of the young by the young themselves. Blaise suffered all his life from various failings that beset the home-bred boy—a certain thin-skinned nervous petulance, a want of self-reliance and self-control. There is more than a grain of truth in Moritz Cantor's saying that Gilberte was the only one of Stephen's three children who really deserved to be called a man. But Stephen's contemporaries gave small

thought to the moral training of their children. Another sixty years must go by before Fénelon will point out that games have an important place in Christian education. And even Fénelon was thinking only of the physical effects of exercise, not of winning battles of Waterloo on the playing-fields of Eton.

Nor is it easy to discipline a mind already in the grip of neurasthenia. Blaise gave early proof of possessing what his sister Jacqueline calls an *humeur bouillante*—the nervous impulsiveness that will soon fling him headlong into science, and then carry him away from science to the world of salons and society, and from the salons to religion. Slow and steady progress seemed to Stephen the one means of bringing balance into such a mind. As Gilberte says in her memoir, he made it a rule to keep the boy's powers ahead of his work. Latin, for instance, was not begun till Blaise was twelve years old. The intervening time was spent in giving him some general notions of the art of learning. He was taught to pick out for himself what was important in a lesson, and shown enough of the uses of grammar to see in it a friend ; for his father made clear that the grim paradigms and syntax, which look so alarming at first sight, really bring order into a chaos, which would be far more alarming without them. And when the time for Latin eventually arrived, Stephen put the *Propria quae maribus* and kindred horrors aside, in favour of more sensible rules drawn up on a system of his own.

Really, however, the classics played but a small part in his system, though Blaise mastered Latin enough to read the Vulgate or a scientific treatise with ease. Greek he only carried so far as enabled him to moralise over the not very recondite point that neuter plurals in that language take the verb in the singular, when they are the subject of a sentence. His father was far too good a mathematician to have great faith in books. He thought them much too apt

to suggest that knowledge is a thing of times and seasons localised in a study ; whereas he wished his boy to see that it is always capable of being acquired wherever reasoning and observation can be set to work. Accordingly he made his lessons as varied and unconventional as possible, and submitted to an endless catechism on the how and why of everything. He was not afraid of inquisitiveness, as a schoolmaster must be, when surrounded by a mob of merciless young critics, any of whom would be glad to annoy him by putting questions that he cannot answer. Stephen's fatherly pride could afford to rejoice, if the budding reasoner now and then managed to drive him into a corner. Ready objections were a sign that Blaise had begun to think for himself, and was not going to turn his back on difficulties, or rest content with half an answer.

But the boy's best teacher was himself. Very soon he began to notice the little everyday oddities of Nature, and puzzle over their explanation. Thus Gilberte records that he was struck one day at dinner by the fact that a plate rings when rapped with a knife, but leaves off ringing at a touch. This led him to make other experiments with sounds, and even to write a little essay on the subject, which was thought excellent by good judges. Whatever the intrinsic merit of these youthful researches, of their moral value there can be no doubt. At an age when most boys are still gulping down masses of undigested statements on trust, Blaise felt himself a serious and responsible student bound in conscience to account for every step in his proofs. At an age when most boys think it no shame to run to a master or a text-book for absolution from their doubts, this future assailant of the Jesuits had learnt that certainty is one of the few things no man can give another ; inasmuch as true and certain knowledge can only be won by each inquirer for himself. And not till he has faced and overcome many difficulties alone does such inquirer begin to see what true and certain

knowledge is. 'The reasons that really convince a man,' Blaise afterwards wrote in the 'Pensées,' 'are those he has found out for himself.'

Hence the veracity, of which his sister speaks as his leading characteristic. 'Always and everywhere,' she says, 'truth was the one object of his life, and nothing would satisfy him but its possession. He had an extraordinary talent in detecting fallacies; whenever bad reasons were given him for anything, he would set about discovering better reasons of his own, for he could not bear to leave a subject until he understood it through and through.' Such a mind turns naturally to mathematics, as the one branch of knowledge whose certainty is all that the most scrupulous can ask; and before he was twelve Blaise had set his heart on learning geometry, the side of mathematics then chiefly in view. But here his father interposed. Stephen knew too well the charm of his own favourite science to expose his boy to its fascinations until he had done with Latin and Greek; Euclid and Archimedes were put off till Blaise should be fifteen. And when the boy persisted in his questions, Stephen only locked up his books, and refused to hear another word on the subject. All he would say was that geometry was the art of making figures perfectly exact, and measuring their proportions. With this scanty equipment—eked out, no doubt, by a surreptitious peep at a text-book, or a few hints from one of his father's friends—the reasoner of twelve set out to build up a geometrical system of his own. Great was Stephen's surprise, on paying an unexpected visit to the play-room, to find his son busy with a lump of chalk drawing diagrams on the wall. He asked him what he was about. Blaise answered that he was trying to prove that the three angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles. Stephen, still more amazed, put him through a catechism. He soon found that—if it is too much to say, with Gilberte, that her brother

had 'reinvented mathematics afresh'—he could, at any rate, satisfactorily account for every step in his proofs. Thereupon the father felt it was useless to fight against Nature any longer. He unlocked his cupboard, and produced a Euclid, which Blaise soon mastered in his play-time.

Startling as this performance may seem, it is by no means unexampled. Much the same story is told of Galileo, though on very shadowy authority; but the eighteenth-century mathematician, Clairault, was certainly no older than Blaise, when he sent his first contribution to the Academy of Science. Mathematics, like music, take little account of age; and in Pascal's youth mathematics were in the air as they have never been before or since. More especially were they in favour with grave lawyers of the type of Stephen Pascal. For the rough amusements of the nobles they had neither taste nor means. In the salons of fine ladies they could not be received, except upon the dubious footing of professional wits; and that their dignity forbade. On the other hand, they could engage in geometrical research as much as they pleased, without being suspected of frivolity or neglect of their professional duties. Amongst themselves, however, these lawyers threw dignity to the winds. Nothing can be less formal than the tone of Judge Fermat's letters, yet Fermat was one of the greatest mathematicians his country has ever produced. And in Stephen's own immediate circle a sufficient guarantee against exuberance of ponderosity was furnished by the presence of Le Pailleur, a practical jester whose best exploits almost foreshadow Theodore Hook. Indeed, the famous picture in the 'Pensées,' of Plato and Aristotle casting off their pedagogic robes, and talking and laughing at their ease, may well have been inspired by some childish reminiscence of Stephen among his friends.

Certainly the father was genial enough at home. Every day, during and after dinner, he used to discuss with his

son what Gilberte calls ' philosophy '—no doubt, the kind of general questions nowadays engrossed by a debating-club. This discipline was all the more needful, since Blaise was changeable and impulsive in no ordinary degree, as well as given to clothing his ideas in startling, paradoxical language. But here it behoved him to be careful, for his father was no tender critic of too ambitious metaphors or epigrams merely smart. He early impressed upon his son that to say clever things just because they were clever was to follow the practice of the bad architects, who think that blind windows improve a house. And when the young reasoner grew too self-assertive, Stephen handed him over to his daughters ; for Gilberte, the typical elder sister, was strong in common sense, and Jacqueline had a lively gift of wit—two qualities that make the most dogmatic brother think twice before he speaks. Their *lettres de raillerie* of later years were only the continuation of a schoolroom dialectic, wherein Blaise was not always master.

Both sisters played a large part in his life. Gilberte even shared some of his lessons—' history, philosophy, mathematics,' says her daughter, obviously speaking rather at random. But her energies ran chiefly in more domestic channels—first as mistress of her father's household, afterwards as her brother's sick-nurse and general protectress, finally as his first biographer. Jacqueline was a more original character. While still in the nursery, she was writing verses—verses at least of average merit. At ten years old she produced a play ; it was ' a comedy in five acts, each divided into scenes, and with all the rules properly observed.' A few years later she was exchanging valentines with Mlle. de Scudéry, the great leader of the *précieuses ;* indeed, she herself was near becoming a *précieuse* in short frocks. Her verses abound with cruel nymphs and sighing swains ; and she bids the traitor, Love, adieu with all the energy to be expected from a poetess of fifteen. But these

affectations could not long survive in a clever and critical home like hers, whose various members by no means stood on formal terms with one another. Certainly Blaise was never backward in ridiculing Scudéry's whole movement, with its tyrannical conventions and mincing elegance of language. Still, there was more in *préciosité* than its conceits. It represented the first faint stirring of the revolt of woman; Scudéry was the lineal ancestress of Mary Wollstonecraft. The great reproach contemporaries brought against her was that she made her followers too intellectual and too independent; as disapproving Fénelon said, they did not 'shrink from learning as from vice,' but had an opinion on every subject, and joined in every dispute. Even their artificiallties were a round-about plea for deference and refinement—a reminder to the dominant sex that the language of the tavern or the guard-room was inadmissible in the salons.

Jacqueline absorbed both the refinement and the independence. Like her brother, she cared exceedingly little for the small conventions of society; it is characteristic that on her first entry at Port Royal she scandalised the nuns by sitting with one knee crossed over the other. Like her brother, she was fastidious, not only in the matter of language. Blaise, as his elder sister records, was ridden by a craving to find perfection everywhere. He must always have the best that money could buy, whether it was the best workmen to carry out his inventions, or the best sauces to his dinner. His books and papers were arranged with truly mathematical neatness; there must be a place for everything, and everything in its place. With Jacqueline these tastes were equally strong, and more enduring. When Blaise was presently converted to Port Royal, and swung round from scrupulous tidiness to the opposite extreme, she rallied him on the love of 'holy dirt,' which made him rank brooms among the articles with which

a true Christian could dispense. Better than anyone she understood the restless excitability that swung him to and fro between science and society, society and religion. Along a part of this same road Jacqueline herself had travelled; though her vagrant susceptibilities were earlier captured, and brought under the stern control of Faith. There they developed into a sanctity unsurpassed at Port Royal itself —'a piety that knew no interruption,' says her Jansenist Director, 'a devotion with more of substance than parade a penitence none the less austere, because half hidden under the cloak of daily habit.'

As yet, however, there were few traces of a future saint in the bright little girl—'endowed,' says her sister, 'with all the great qualities of every age'—who scribbled her verses in the morning, and spent the afternoon among her dolls. Before long she blossomed into something of a personage, became known to several families of influence at Court, and even dropped a youthful curtsey to Queen Anne of Austria. These acquaintances had their use. In the spring of 1638, Richelieu—always in want of money —arbitrarily reduced the rate of interest on Government stock. Forthwith great indignation among the shareholders, amongst whom was Stephen Pascal; a deputation, several hundred strong, waited on Lord Chancellor Séguier. Some angry speeches were delivered, and several of the speakers arrested; in trying to get a friend released Stephen himself fell under suspicion. To avoid the Bastille he fled to Clermont, and remained there over a year, only venturing back to Paris by stealth in order to nurse Jacqueline through a sharp attack of smallpox. On her recovery she repaid him well. Richelieu, whose dramatic tastes were peculiar, was suddenly struck with the idea of having one of his favourite plays—it was 'The Tyranny of Love,' by Scudéry, a brother of the *précieuse*—acted by a party of children. Influential friends recommended Jacqueline to the Duchess

of Aiguillon, niece of the all-powerful Minister. She gave the child a leading part, and promised to find her an opportunity of interceding for her father. In these good offices she was abetted by the celebrated actor, Mondory, himself a native of Clermont. The performance took place on April 3, 1639; and on the following day Jacqueline sent an account of it to her father.

'As soon as the piece was over,' she says, 'I came down from the stage, meaning to speak to Mme. d'Aiguillon. But, as the Lord Cardinal was leaving, M. de Mondory pressed me to go straight up to him. So I stepped forward, and began my petition, which he received more kindly and caressingly than words can say. As soon as he saw me, he cried out: "Why, there 's the little Pascal!" As I went on with my verses, he took me on his knee and kissed me many times over. When I had finished, he said: "Yes, I grant all you ask. Write and tell your father that he may come back in perfect safety." Thereupon Mme. d'Aiguillon came up, and said: "Really, my Lord, you should do something for the father; I have often heard him spoken of as a most excellent man. It is a pity that his talents are wasted. Besides, he has a son, who is already very learned in mathematics, although he is only fifteen." As the Cardinal was so kind, I asked if you might come and thank him on your return. He answered: "Yes, tell your father to come and see me." Then, as Mme. d'Aiguillon seemed to be going, my sister came up to bid her good-bye. She spoke to her in the friendliest way, and asked where my brother was. My sister fetched him, and to him also she was very civil, and paid him great compliments on his learning. Then she took us into another room, where a splendid supper was laid out of jellies, fruit and lemonade. All the time she kept on petting me; I cannot tell you how kindly I was treated by them all.'

This letter brought Stephen back post-haste to Paris. With his whole family he waited on the Cardinal, and was most graciously received. Richelieu congratulated himself on having restored their father to such amiable children, and promised that he would one day make them into something great. A few months later he appointed Stephen assistant to the Intendant of Normandy, a position of very considerable importance. And before Christmas, 1639, the whole family had taken up their abode in Rouen.

CHAPTER II

ROUEN

Madame d'Aiguillon said no more than the truth when she told Richelieu that Blaise Pascal was 'very clever at mathematics.' His powers had grown apace since the day when his father found him drawing diagrams on the wall; and before he left Paris for Rouen, they had already attracted the notice of Stephen's learned friends. Following a usual practice of their country—for Frenchmen must be sociable, even in their mathematics—these ardent geometers had organised themselves into a club, which met every Thursday night at the house of one or other of its members. 'Celeberrima Academia Matheseos Parisiensis' Blaise will presently call it; and a few years after his death it grew into the official Académie des Sciences or Royal Society of France. At present, however, it was simply a heterogeneous assemblage of men devoted to a science altogether free from what they hated and despised as 'pedantry.' The academic learning of the time was still in bondage to Aristotle and the past—still toiled wearily along behind a convoy of worm-eaten folios. As Galileo said contemptuously, it strove to interpret the face of Nature by comparison of texts, as though she were the Æneid or the Odyssey. Everywhere reigned the Dryasdust of Boileau's satire:

> Un pédant, énivré de sa vaine science,
> Tout hérissé de grec, tout bouffi d'arrogance,
> Croit qu'un livre fait tout, et que sans Aristote
> La raison ne voit goutte, et le bon sens radote.

But geometry took little heed of Greek philosophers—'Dead heathen blinking owl-like in the sun of Christian fact,' cried one enthusiast of the Paris Club. Its boast was that science meant solving problems for oneself, not knowing what other men had thought about them: that was the domain of history. To all who would listen it offered three things unobtainable elsewhere: definite problems to work at, a clear method to work by, and absolutely sure results. Starting from premises so simple and familiar that the feeblest brain could grasp them, it professed to guide the inquirer along a path unerringly exact from what was simple to what was complex, and so indefinitely on, so far as he had strength to follow.

Accordingly many sorts of men foregathered at the club. The world of fashion was represented by Stephen's jovial friend Le Pailleur; he worked at geometry in moments stolen from gossiping with fine ladies, whose amusement was his business in life. A correspondent was Jean Louis Guez de Balzac, nicknamed the Grand Épistolier de France, or Lord High Letter-writer. Officially he ranks as one of the founders of French prose, but in private life he was a vainglorious chatterer; the joke ran that he suffered from a chronic cold caught while promenading his Ego about in insufficient attire. For hearers of this class, papers were read on popular subjects, such as flying machines, or phonetic spelling.[1] At the opposite intellectual pole stood another intimate friend of the Pascals, Gilles Personne de Roberval, an eminent but very cross-grained professor from the Collège de France. Original enough, but far from lucid, and very secretive in his habits, he loved, as he said, to gloat over his discoveries *nimium juveniliter* at home, instead of giving them to the world; he had always

[1] A good idea of the miscellaneous nature of the subjects discussed may be gathered from Father Mersenne's *Questions Inouïes, ou Récréation des Savants*, Paris, 1634.

some great feud on hand with other savants who had failed to grasp his meaning, or forestalled him in the publication of some new idea. He is the original, also, of a story told of many Senior Wranglers. Being taken to hear a play of Corneille, he came back bursting with the question: 'What does all that poetry *prove*?'

Between the professor and the wits came a crowd of lawyers—Stephen himself, Carcavi, and Judge Mydorge. The judge's mission was to uphold Cartesian principles at the club. He was one of the few whom Descartes ranked among his 'true and faithful friends,' and he repaid the compliment by spending a large part of his fortune on costly optical instruments for the philosopher's use. Yet a new element appeared in Pierre Petit, a young specialist in military engineering, and in Girard Desargues, alike mathematician, engineer and architect. Desargues has a special interest as the first master of Blaise Pascal, and as the practical philanthropist of the club. Full of pity for the poor mechanics of Paris and his native Lyons, he devoted himself to the invention of labour-saving appliances; he gave lectures on popular science to working men, in the hope of bringing trained intelligence into the shops to replace traditional rule of thumb. It is to be feared that these efforts met with small success, and Desargues' genius had to wait two hundred years for recognition. But his example was not lost on the future inventor of the Arithmetical Machine; and Pascal certainly laid to heart one of his favourite maxims—namely, that literary elegance has its place even in a scientific treatise. For Desargues duly passed on to others the advice that Descartes once gave him—to write down to the level of such readers as yawned each time they turned a page, and expected mathematics to be made as thrilling as the enchanted castle in a tale.

But the soul of the club was Father Mersenne, a Friar Minim of St. Francis de Paul. He was one of the most

attractive figures of his time ; even the surliest, says Baillet, could not hold out against him long. Like many men of peace, however, Mersenne loved nothing better than to see his friends at war. The whole scientific movement of the age appeared to him like a vast tournament between the Ancients and the Moderns, and the great object of his life was to spur on his own side into making a brave show in the lists. His own share lay in organisation and correspondence. For years he kept the club in touch with half the learned men in Europe, and especially with its own non-resident members. First among these stood Descartes, whose moody, cross-grained genius proved unequal to suffering the fools of Paris. In 1629 he had left France for Holland, where there were no importunate visitors, and he could practise his favourite maxim : *Bene vixit, qui bene latuit.* Then there was the Abbé Gassendi, who set out to restore the Epicurean philosophy from the vantage-ground of a rustic cathedral close. Lastly came the great mathematician, Pierre Fermat, a judge of the *Parlement* of Toulouse.

Still, Mersenne was much more than ' Descartes' letter-box,' as he has sometimes been profanely styled. Pascal bears witness that he had an extraordinary talent for raising difficult and important questions ; thereafter he gave his friends no peace, till some one cleverer than himself had found the answer. If they were lazy, he pricked them on by appealing to very human motives ; indeed, he seems to have thought that scientific tempers were only made to be lost. Many a quarrel was of his brewing, notably the great dispute about infinitesimals between Descartes and Judge Fermat. ' Your Mr. Justice *De Minimis,*' the contemptuous philosopher wrote, in allusion to the title of his adversary's treatise. Into this feud Stephen Pascal was dragged on Fermat's side ; while as to Roberval, his professorial gown was always skimming, like a black-winged

stormy petrel, over some scene of combat. For him Descartes had a special dislike—based, it would seem, on jealousy of what he thought was an ill-deserved reputation; and Roberval was not the man to let ill-will go unrequited. But Mersenne cared not a jot for his choler. Science, he said, would never advance, unless savants could be got to criticise each other freely; posterity would care no more about their incidental broils than one cares about a few scratches upon one's flint, after it has struck a light.

Such were the leading men of a club whose youngest member Blaise became. And although fate removed him from Paris before he could take much part in its discussions, he ever after looked back to them with a lively sense of gratitude. 'I was brought up amongst you from my tenderest years,' he once informed the members in a formal Latin letter, 'and all my labours have been fostered by the kindly patronage of your erudite Lyceum.' There was more truth in the stilted phrase than perhaps Blaise himself suspected; the changes and chances of his career owe not a little to the fact that he first saw the light of reason in a scientific club. In the first place, it was his school of manners. Surprise has sometimes been shown at the variations in his behaviour. One day he would boldly defy men much above him in age and position, and the next day sit humbly at the feet of persons almost incredibly beneath him—as, for instance, the Chevalier de Méré, his mentor in polite society. And Catholic critics cannot forgive him for always refusing to acknowledge that men with tonsured heads—for example, his Jesuit opponent, Father Noel—ought to be treated with more respect than men who let their hair grow naturally. The truth is that he behaved to all his neighbours as though they were members of the club. There the right to speak depended simply on degree of information; seniors who knew little of a subject must be content to sit and listen

to juniors who knew much. Blaise was high-handed with Father Noel, because concerning atmospheric pressure the Jesuit was less learned than he; equally he deferred to Méré, because in matters of etiquette the Chevalier was the wiser of the two. In other words, he measured his neighbours by purely intellectual standards; and, no doubt, it showed sad ignorance of the world to suppose them capable of being so judged. Afterwards experience taught him better. 'Birth,' he wrote in the 'Pensées,' 'is a great advantage. It makes a boy of eighteen as much known and respected as hard-working commoners can hope to be at fifty. That means thirty years to the good.' [1]

As yet, however, such reflections had not suggested an inquiry into the nature of original sin. Blaise simply applied to the world at large the maxim of the club, that no one who attended its meetings must think himself beyond the reach of criticism. Often, no doubt, the criticism was crude and ill-directed enough. Leibniz draws a lively picture of the sufferings of Descartes under the hands of Roberval. 'Roberval,' he says, 'was a proud, excitable and disputatious man. M. Descartes saw much deeper into things, and was more capable of making discoveries. But, like all meditative characters, he was so lost in the contemplation of vast horizons as to have little leisure to spare for the petty details under his feet. M. Roberval, on the other hand, had only his mathematics to think of, and was a teacher by profession; every scrap of knowledge he possessed, was, so to speak, on the tip of his tongue. Hence he often seemed to have the best of it, at any rate to superficial judges.' [2] Leibniz sides with his brother-philosopher; but most of Pascal's friends and masters thought that Descartes would have done better had he listened a little more to men like Roberval. No theory,

[1] *Pens.* 322.
[2] *Nouvelles Lettres de Leibniz*, ed. Foucher de Careil (Paris, 1857), p. 35.

however magnificent in outline, was worth much in their eyes, unless it could face the nibbling accuracy of small-minded pedants, or the rough iconoclasm of common sense.

Besides, an academic society is always critical rather than constructive. It has seen too many theories come and go to be much dazzled by their brilliancy. It knows how much their success depends on accidental advantages —on their propounder's force of character, on his skill in logical fence, or even on his strength of lung; whereas a solid fact stands, so to speak, on legs of its own, and can dispense with dialectic. Facts, moreover, can be tested; whereas the theorists are most successful on foggy, unexplored domains, where no one can be brought to book. There they can tear each other to pieces without any risk of running their heads against a stone wall of realities. 'Each of them,' Pascal will presently write, 'makes enemies of all the rest; and as they all combine against him, his defeat is certain. Thus they are all successful, but only over one another; and no one can get much good from a victory only made possible by his own want of accurate knowledge. For truth does not make her home among this noisy, puzzled crowd. She reveals herself only to those who make it their rule to assent to none but certain propositions, and refuse either to affirm or to deny whenever the evidence is doubtful. This is the perfect equilibrium; this is the golden mean. Herein, by a stroke of good fortune, I can never prize enough, I was brought up with singular exactitude and more than fatherly care.' [1]

The seed that Stephen had so anxiously sown soon ripened into fruit. About the time of his departure for Rouen Blaise sent his first printed performance to the press; it was the advertisement of a forthcoming work on conic sections, following the lines of an already published treatise by Desargues. This enterprise was the more

[1] *Lettre à M. Le Pailleur, Works*, iii. p. 61.

remarkable, since Desargues' book was a new departure—so new that many grown-up mathematicians failed to understand it. The innovation lay in treating all conic sections as varieties of a single curve, as opposed to the old-fashioned practice of considering each one by itself. Blaise not only fell in with this new method, but carried it much farther than its inventor had done; this Desargues was the first to acknowledge, when he gave the name of *la Pascale* to the 'mystic hexagram' which formed the pivot of his pupil's demonstration. No wonder that a chorus of praise uprose from the Paris Club, led by the ever-kindly and ever-hyperbolical Mersenne. At once he wrote off word to Descartes that a new mathematical prodigy had arisen in the person of President Pascal's son, who had climbed over the shoulders of all his contemporaries on to an even higher pedestal than Apollonius. This comparison was scarcely judicious, since Descartes thought exceedingly little of the geometers of antiquity, and indeed was more than chary of admiring anyone; he answered that beating the tedious old Greek was no great matter to boast of, even for a boy of sixteen. And when Mersenne sent him the pamphlet, he only drew attention to a sentence in which Blaise acknowledged his debt to Desargues. No doubt this discourtesy was chiefly intended for Mersenne, who had made no mention of Desargues, although in that ill-recognised genius Descartes took a special interest. But graciousness was not to be expected from a philosopher whose correspondence is a kind of scientific Dunciad; Descartes was fond of telling his critics that he took no more notice of their objections than he did of a pack of little curs idly yapping round his heels. Besides, he may well have been nettled at finding his own book on geometry passed over in silence, although it had been two years in print, and was about to revolutionise the science. Nor was this neglect accidental. Blaise differed from

Descartes on every point over which mathematicians could disagree—as to the value of their common science, its methods, and its scope.

At Rouen, however, these theoretical differences slept for a while. There Blaise was at once impressed into the business of his father's office. The work of an Intendant was at all times burdensome enough ; for on these newly-created officials—lineal ancestors of the modern *préfet*—Richelieu's centralising policy had piled every sort and kind of function, administrative and judicial. Hitherto the provinces had been governed by a number of local bodies independent of each other and largely independent of the Crown. The rise of the Intendants meant the triumph of centralisation. Their first duty was to force the local bodies into touch with the executive in Paris ; their second was to wring as much money as possible out of their departments. For seventeen years of war with the Empire had brought the national exchequer very low, and Richelieu—always a hand-to-mouth financier—could only get supplies by reckless increase of the taxes, and still more reckless creation of new monopolies and dues farmed out to French analogues of Mompesson and Giles. Naturally his methods called forth much opposition, constitutional and otherwise. In the summer of 1639, the great industrial town of Rouen was goaded into open insurrection by the creation of a number of 'hereditary inspectors of dyeing,' with full power to enter any warehouse, factory or shop, and examine all the goods contained therein. One of the new inspectors was murdered, while trying to exercise his functions ; and the city police did not look very carefully for the guilty parties. Nor did they bestir themselves during the rioting which followed, when other monopolists were maltreated and their registers destroyed. So Richelieu resolved to teach the town a lesson. Most of the magistrates were suspended, and replaced by officials

from the capital. Over the new finance department Stephen Pascal was set to preside.

His work was as irksome as it was unpopular. He had to decide on all claims to exemption made by the nobles or clergy; he must assess to a kind of arbitrary income-tax all plebeians whom the law thought to be 'in easy circumstances'; and he must apportion the incidence of general imposts as equitably as possible among the eighteen hundred townships in his district. Nor were his duties lightened by the unrestful state of the country. Half the local officials had been dismissed; the other half could not be trusted. The new Intendant must fight his way through a chaos of lost account-books and inaccurate returns. Well might Stephen write to his daughter: 'I am ten times busier than ever I was before. Very little more would break me down completely. For four months I have never got to bed before two o'clock in the morning.'

At this point Blaise came to his father's assistance. Vast columns of figures had to be gone through, and naturally every kind of ready-reckoner was pressed into the service. But none of these could quite be trusted. One, known as 'the counters,' was too cumbrous; another, known as 'the pen,' left too much to the intelligence of the clerk who used it. So Blaise was struck with the idea of inventing a machine that should perform the four rules of arithmetic 'by necessary movements independent of the operator's will, and as simply as was possible to Nature.' The scheme was not absolutely new. At the close of the previous century the Scotch mathematician, Napier of Merchiston, had produced a set of calculating rods, which obtained a European celebrity under the name of Napier's Bones. A few years later the Dutch Jesuit, Ciermans, constructed a real calculating machine. But Napier's Bones were almost incredibly clumsy, and Ciermans' invention never came before the public; Gilberte Pascal is justified in her

boast that her brother 'introduced a novelty into nature, and reduced to mechanism a science whose seat is wholly in the human mind.'

The machine was begun in 1640, but before an even provisional success was reached, nearly five years had been spent, and more than fifty models constructed. Some were made with 'straight pins, some with curved, some with chains; some with concentric, others with eccentric wheels; some with upright, some with circular, or else conical or cylindrical action. Others were entirely different again, either in material or shape or working.'[1] Nor were these Pascal's only troubles. He soon found that beating metals with a hammer was a very different thing from drawing diagrams in a study; and still harder was it to make himself intelligible to his workmen, ignorant of the very alphabet of science. Moreover, he was haunted by the fear that his invention would not get a hearing. It was ambitious and out of the common; he himself was still obscure, although quite old enough to realise that the world has an 'unjust prejudice' against the discoveries of unknown young men. Nor was it much comfort to remember that in one quarter he was sure of attention; for that quarter was the hypercritical assemblage presided over by Mersenne. His imagination heard specialists in geometry calling his machine unduly complex, and specialists in mechanics scoffing at its clumsiness—as though mathematical nicety was the only thing to be considered, when an instrument is intended for hard, practical work.

Worst of all, came the news that a rival inventor had taken the field. At this Blaise lost his self-control. 'With my own eyes I have seen a travesty of my machine made by a watchmaker at Rouen. Guided merely by what he had heard of my first model, he had the effrontery to construct

[1] *Privilège du Roi pour la Machine arithmétique*, in *Works*, iii. p. 194.

another of his own—and what is worse, with a different kind of action. It is true he is a worthy fellow, very clever with his tools, and not without some aptitude for matters only indirectly touching on his trade. But he scarcely so much as knows that such sciences as geometry or mechanics exist; and although his machine looks neat and pretty enough on the outside, the interior is so radically defective that it never can be of any use. Still, its novelty has gained it a warm welcome from those who understand nothing of the subject; and it has even found a place on the shelves of a gentleman of the same town, who collects rare and curious objects. The sight of this little monster filled me with disgust; I sent away my workmen, and resolved never to give the matter another thought. For I was naturally afraid lest other such caricaturists might arise, and cover my machine with ridicule, before the public had a chance of deciding on its merits. But soon afterwards the Lord Chancellor deigned to inspect my first model; and thinking well of it, he enjoined on me to proceed. And when he saw that it was fear that held me back, he was pleased to cut down the evil at the root, to prevent it doing further harm to my good name or the public advantage. For he issued an extraordinary patent in my favour, the effect of which is to strangle before their birth any other such monstrosities as may be begotten otherwise than in the lawful wedlock of theory and art.'[1]

The childish petulance of this outburst has been a stumbling-block to many critics. But there was much more than a young man's wounded vanity at stake. At first sight it seems strange to think of Pascal in connexion with the higgling of the market; yet his Machine, begun purely in the interests of his father's office, was certainly continued as a commercial speculation. On its final completion some

[1] *Avis nécessaire à tout ceux qui auront curiosité de voir la Machine arithmétique*, *Works*, iii. p. 187.

years later models were exhibited in Paris, and no less of a personage than Professor Roberval undertook to explain their workings to intending purchasers. Hence the watchmaker was detestable as a possible rival in trade. But he was also still more detestable for another reason. A member of the Paris Club—more especially its youngest member—was bound to stand very much on his dignity, whenever questions arose concerning the 'lawful wedlock of theory and art.' He was one of the elect of science condescending—as Desargues had before him—to turn his sacred deposit of learning to practical account; whereas the poor watchmaker was no better than a quack, who laid his bungling hands on the ark of the scientific covenant. And to the odiousness of quackery Pascal's generation was peculiarly alive. To the mass of Frenchmen science was still an unknown land; another half-century must go by, before Fontenelle would bring it within reach of every drawing-room. Hence the world did not trouble to distinguish between one man of science and another; it included under a common ban the followers of Galileo and the recruits of Paracelsus. Thrilled to the marrow by lurid tales of Cardan and Vanini, respectability suspected all alike; a strong smell of brimstone still clung round every telescope or test-tube. Mersenne was driven into public protest against the popular impression that mathematicians and medical men were necessarily atheists. Descartes was set down as an atheist, a Jesuit, a Rosicrucian, or an Anabaptist, according to individual taste; while as to Blaise Pascal, the Memoirs of a prominent contemporary dismiss him as an adept at Black Magic.

Not but what the cloud of prejudice was slowly lifting. Among Paris wits a man of science was not so much an object of horror as an object of good-natured contempt. Mathematics were a harmless amusement, when not too openly paraded; and Saint Évremond put the applied sciences in

their place, when he said that a gentleman should show them every encouragement short of soiling his fingers by studying them himself. Centres of provincial enlightenment followed in the wake of Paris. At Rouen, Pascal found it easy enough to collect an audience to witness his early experiments in the vacuum. Nor were serious critics altogether wanting. There was Dr. Pierius from the Archiepiscopal College, who brought to the maintenance of ultra-conservative opinions considerable learning and a resourcefulness of criticism that caused the young innovator many anxious hours. There was Dr. Guiffart, a physician and specialist in ordnance questions, and an amiable, liberal-minded man, who valiantly defended Blaise against the onslaughts of Pierius. Lastly, there was young Adrien Auzout, who grew up to leave a permanent mark on the history of astronomy.

However, the greatest man in Rouen was not an astronomer, but a poet. When the Pascals settled there, Corneille was still dividing his time between the local Admiralty Court and the creation of a national drama in France. His 'Cid' had taken Paris by storm at Christmas, 1636; Jacqueline's actor-friend, Mondory, could write in triumph that the seats in the gallery, usually given over to pages, were thronged with noblemen in blue ribbons. With Corneille himself Jacqueline was not long in making friends, and at his instance she competed successfully for a prize-poem of some local note. On her brother, however, the poet made but small impression. In conversation he was anything but lucid; he himself admitted an incurable propensity to put the wrong word in the wrong place. And Blaise was far too much engrossed by his science to waste more time on poetry than was required to write it down as the very essence of affectation and unreality. The aim of science was to reach the literal truth of things; the aim of poetry was to 'mask and disguise' it under a coat of literary paint. In vain the

poets urged that facts meant nothing, unless caught up and transfigured by the imagination of the writer. Blaise answered that here precisely lay the error. Any faithful copy of nature had a certain value—though art bore daily witness to its own futility by imitating worthless models—but a copy garbled by human fancy had no value at all. It is the principle of Napoleon, when he said that the worst of all faults in a general was carving 'pictures' out of a battle-field.

For this gross misconception of their art the poets themselves were largely to blame. Frenchmen have always been slow to admit that poetry is something other than a logical demonstration in holiday costume; and in the rational seventeenth century such a confession was doubly ungrateful. Corneille himself had no sure hold on the distinction between a truth of sentiment and a truth of fact; and many of the smaller writers talked as though a lyric poem were a kind of rhyming affidavit. Desmarets de Saint Sorlin, for instance, was just now preaching a return from classical to Christian themes, on the ground that the actions of the true God—just because the God was true—could be told with greater literary charm than the exploits of the false. A generation later uprose Corneille's own nephew, Fontenelle, to defend verse as a useful means of putting difficult ideas into clear and simple language—much as the Covenanters defended their metrical version of the Psalms as being 'handy cantle to mind.' On such principles Blaise judged poetry, and condemned it. For exposition it was useless, because it lacked the necessary freedom. A sonnet cannot afford to wait, while conscientiousness develops its whole case; ballads have no room for qualifying clauses, or exceptions to the rule. Let a writer begin to follow truth wherever it leads him, and Giants Order, Lucidity and Picturesqueness promptly block the way; ever and anon they force him to say either more or less than

he meant. The same gangrene of untruthfulness creeps into the wording of his very phrases; long before his conversion to Port Royal Blaise had adopted the dictum of its leaders that the exigencies of rhyme have turned many a poet into a liar. For argument poetry was worse than useless. The most cogent demonstration it admitted was a slip-shod metaphor ill-applied. So whenever Jacqueline read out some grandiloquent passage likening the stormy fortunes of the great to lightning that attracts the thunderbolt, Blaise interrupted her with the tart rejoinder that, if the lightning were to change its habits, and take to striking low-lying ground, the poets and people who thought that sort of thing was argument would be sadly at a loss for 'proofs.'[1]

Besides, he was not a little nettled at the quasi-scientific airs affected by the critics of the time. The great heroes of the sixteenth century had been over-ballasted by miscellaneous erudition; by dint of reading everything there was to read, Rabelais and Montaigne had read themselves out of the power of steering any definite course. But now a reaction had set in towards uniformity and order. Success was everywhere proclaimed impossible, unless a writer knew exactly whence he started, whither he was bound, and what means he intended to employ. Not only a great poet like Corneille, but every little rhymester Jacqueline read could spin elaborate theories about his 'art'; while for the benefit of inexperience authoritative canons were drawn up, and soon acquired a superstitious sanctity. The rules of poetry were codified, so were the rules of eloquence, and even the rules of conversation—all with a show of comprehensiveness and trenchancy that would have been in better place had poetry been mathematics. To Blaise the whole proceeding seemed an impudent caricature, aping the methods of the most exact of sciences on a field neither scientific nor exact. It would be time enough to determine

[1] *Pens.* 39.

the rules. when these wiseacres had settled between them wherein the essence of poetry lay. ' People talk of poetical beauty,' he said, ' but never of geometrical or medical beauty. The reason is that everyone knows that the object of geometry is proof, and the object of medicine is cure ; but no one knows what pleasure is, which is the object of poetry. And as they cannot furnish us with a natural model to imitate, they fall back on a string of fantastic expressions—"golden age," "marvel of our time," and the like—and call this stuff poetical beauty. But anyone who will imagine a woman built on this pattern (which consists in giving big names to little things) will have before him a pretty girl bedizened all over with looking-glasses and chains ; and these will make him laugh, for he knows much better what is charming in a woman than what is charming in a poem. But a man without taste will admire her the more because of her finery, and there are villages where she would be taken as queen. That is why we call sonnets composed on this model *village-queens*.' [1]

This passage belongs to a later date ; it was not at Rouen that Blaise learned to criticise feminine attractions. But the idea is old enough. All his life long Pascal made relentless war on ' village-queens '—that is, on showy codes and systems drawn up without regard to the ' natural model ' of common-sense experience. It mattered not whether they took shape as *précieux* poetry, or Cartesian science, or Jesuit morality. Priests, philosophers and poets seemed to Pascal all alike. Impelled by the same desire for a ready-made standard of guidance, they had thrown themselves into the arms of system ; and system rewarded their submissiveness by inspiring a most delusive confidence in itself. One and all took it lightly for granted that a question must be rightly answered, once the orthodox methods had been applied ; to a mind trained never to look beyond them these

[1] *Pens.* 33.

seemed so full, so sensible, so sure, that what was reached by their aid could never be wrong. Here and there, no doubt, some stubborn fact arose that would not fit in with their requirements ; but the world was large, and hundreds of other facts were forthcoming as to which no difficulty arose. But Pascal was one of those scrupulous spirits who cannot tie blinkers over their eyes ; unlike the traditional geologist, he would never roll an inconvenient boulder two hundred feet downhill ' into conformity with my system.' To him it mattered little whether a theory was sensible, or practical, or logically self-consistent ; the one and only question was whether the theory was true. And truth required some more objective guarantee than any amount of logic could supply.

This guarantee it was the task of Nature to provide. But what did Pascal understand by this Protean word ? The answer will vary much at different stages of his career. At Rouen ' Nature ' was simply the subject of science—a bare expanse of cold, dead matter stretched out to infinity—the boundless spaces, whose eternal silence will fill the Christian Pascal with affright. Kinship between them there was none ; and to speak as though there were, was to compromise the fundamental dualism of things, and ' speak of the material in terms of spirit.' For no fault had Pascal less indulgence ; his own chief physical exploit lay in proving that Nature had not ' spirituality ' enough to feel even a metaphorical horror of a vacuum. On the other hand, just because she was without any bias of her own, she made the best of witnesses ; once put a question fairly to her, and she could not choose but answer truly. Before he left Rouen, Pascal had begun to pass from mathematics to experimental physics. After all, geometry was a merely ideal science dealing with notions, not with things ; whereas in physics the decision lay with experiment, that is, with Nature herself.

Apart from the scientific interest, Pascal could take no sort of pleasure in Nature. Most writers of the time admitted her to their presence, after the gardener and the architect had worked their will upon her. She was useful in providing decorative backgrounds for a picture—'horizons formés à souhait pour le plaisir des yeux,' as one of their own poets has said. Boileau admitted the value of a forest as an occasional refuge for jaded literary men; and even Descartes felt 'a certain lightsomeness, when the weather was fairer than ordinary.' But neither forests nor trim lawns had any charm for Blaise. 'The weather and my humours,' he said, 'have little to do with one another. I have fogs and sunshine of my own within me'[1]—perhaps the most 'unnatural' declaration ever made by mortal man. Still, there is a grey magnificence in this entire detachment from the physical world around him. Here Pascal, the experimentalist man of science, joins hands with Pascal, the Jansenist ascetic. To both Nature is the enemy; though one strives to conquer her by thought, the other by prayer and fasting. Their methods may be different, but their aim is one and the same. Each must subdue the flesh—must stamp upon corruptible matter the impress of incorruptible mind. 'Man is a reed—the feeblest in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The universe need not arm for his defeat; a fume, a drop of water will dispatch him. Yet crush him, and he still remains nobler than his destroyer, because he knows that he is dying; whereas the universe knows nothing of its victory. All our dignity is born of thought. The universe may encompass me, and swallow up my body like an atom; my mind still casts a girdle round it. Let us, then, strive hard to think well: there lies the secret of a moral life.'[2]

[1] *Pens.* 107. [2] *Pens.* 347.

CHAPTER III

THE DEAD HAND

Balzac, the Lord High Letter-writer, once congratulated Descartes on introducing a new 'sovereignty' into the world. And herein Balzac was right. During Pascal's youth natural science was slowly overflowing the narrow bounds of the Paris Club, and rising to be a great power in the realm of thought. Blaise grew up in the midst of a never-ending discussion of the principles involved by its rise. Was it a mere intellectual amusement, or did it reveal the universe in a new light? What should be its attitude towards philosophy, towards the Church, towards its own traditions? Must it remain content to develop principles already established, or might it strike out new lines of its own? If so, should mathematics be its tool, or practical experiment? At first the club had studied geometry simply for its own sake, without much thought of its practical application; and some of its most distinguished members remained true all their lives to this earlier tradition. Judge Fermat, for instance, never deserved the reproach a whimsical critic once brought against Sir Isaac Newton, of 'prostituting mathematics to the service of astronomy.' To other contemporaries of Galileo and Kepler such self-restraint was impossible. Why should new planets swim only into a German or Italian ken, when Frenchmen had at hand in their geometry an unfailing instrument of limitless

discovery? 'To arithmetic it is given,' cried Mersenne, 'to number the several parts of the universe, but geometry investigates its magnitude. Like a second Atlas, it labours until its head has touched the stars; nor may the farthest reaches of the Firmament defy the visits of its measuring-rod.'

Accordingly, the good priest bestirred himself to translate Galileo's books, in the hope of inducing his fellow-members to take the great Florentine as their model, and turn their favourite study to serious account. Not that either master or disciple made astronomical discovery the one goal of their researches. Galileo was much more than a great explorer of the heavens; his best services to science were rendered in the department of mechanics, investigating their first principles—laws of motion, virtual velocities, and the like. 'To discover spots in the sun, or satellites round Jupiter,' said Lagrange, 'needed only patience and a telescope; but it required a very great man to formulate the laws of things that are everywhere happening before our eyes.' It required also more than usual courage. Seventeenth century orthodoxy held that all these matters had been settled long ago by Aristotle—not, of course, the real Greek, but a Latinised, or 'Germanic' Aristotle, wrought into conformity with mediæval dogma by the schoolmen, and thenceforward covered by the mantle of the Church. Hence the superstitious reverence attaching to his name. Galileo's colleague, Libri, would not put his eye to a telescope, lest he should see what Aristotle had not seen; Gassendi knew another professor, who thought he did God acceptable service by offering to shed his blood in defence of every syllable Aristotle ever wrote. 'Respect for the Ancients,' cries Blaise Pascal, 'has nowadays reached such a pitch that men make oracles of all they said, and sacred mysteries of what they did not understand. It is treasonable to contradict them, and misprision of treason to call them in

question.' Nor was this 'Stagyrolatry'—for Aristotle was the Ancient of Ancients—peculiar to the Catholic world. If Giordano Bruno may be believed, the proctors of Elizabethan Oxford exacted their customary fine of five shillings for every breach of the laws of logic laid down in Aristotle's 'Organon.' Hence the shattering of the idol was of capital importance; and with this Galileo began his career. Aristotle having laid down that heavy bodies fall faster than light ones in proportion to their weight, Galileo marched up the Leaning Tower of Pisa; and thence, in the presence of several scholastic professors, let fall a ten-pound and a one-pound weight. Both reached the ground at the same moment, and with them fell belief in Aristotle's infallibility.

But reverence for Aristotle's personal authority was not the only obstacle Galileo had to fight. Behind that reverence, and supporting it, was the scholastic theory itself, fortified by centuries of unquestioning acceptance, as well as by an intimate conviction of the grandiosity of its own aim. It had undertaken to prove that the universe only gains a meaning when read in the light of the Christian Church; for the Church's service they had been created, and by the Church's dogmas they must be explained. Not man alone, but animals and trees and brute inanimate matter had their purpose; and the task the schoolman set before him was to show how all these tiny brooks united in the broad river of the Catholic scheme. Before the Præparatio Evangelica of human, must come the Præparatio of natural history: the reason why fishes swim, why kettles boil, why sugar is sweet, must be found to be ultimately deducible from some attribute of God.

Such a theory was little likely to welcome new truths from the outside; its business was not to discover, but to interpret, what already was. Again and again it rearranged the settled store of physical facts left behind by Aristotle,

until the manner of arrangement began to appear of more importance than the facts themselves. Logic, which at first had been the servant, rose to be head of the house. Unchecked by rivalry with other sciences, it moulded all the thought of its disciples ; they soon came to believe that the laws which governed the inner world of their ideas must be equally obeyed by the external world of things. What was Nature for, except to work in syllogisms ? What were mere phenomena to do, but bow before a science that had its roots in the Divine ? Logic had built the schoolmen a continuing city well-garrisoned, four-square ; and they were in no mind to see its symmetry destroyed by new barbarian discoveries. Hence they made short work enough of any physical fact that did not fit in with their preconceptions. As Galileo said, they tried to tear his new planets out of the heavens by logical arts, as though by a kind of magical incantation. Nor did the most honest schoolman feel any shame at his own performance. On his principles God had first created Nature, and then human reason to explain her. Far from him, then, the Baconian precept to conquer Nature by obeying her—that is, by suiting our theories to her facts. What was this but exalting the interpreted above the interpreter—dead matter over living mind ?

This blind confidence in logic gave birth to the scholastic ' pedantry.' All argument, unless kept in continual check by experience, necessarily falls into the hands of a few men of genius ; the modest inquirer becomes less anxious to see things for himself than to know what his intellectual heroes had to say about them. Deliberately he refuses to grapple with questions at first hand ; as Galileo said contemptuously, he feels that his reason must remain unfruitful, unless it is mated with some greater mind. Nor was this cowardice peculiar to the clerical world. Whatever their official faculty, all scholastic professors were by instinct theologians ; even into an anatomical lecture-room they carried the

methods of the divinity school. Their principles were not the principles of science, vast working hypotheses liable to ceaseless alteration; they were inelastic dogmas fixed unalterably for all time. As there was an ecclesiastical 'deposit of faith' depending on Scripture and the Fathers, so also there was a deposit of scientific faith implicitly contained in Aristotle or Hippocrates. This it was the student's business to elucidate and develop in the light thrown on it by later accredited masters, Galen, Averrhoes, Fernel. But woe betide him if he dare advance original theories of his own; the famous theological maxim, that a heretic is a man who has *an* opinion, applied quite as much to mechanics or medicine as to the doctrine of grace.

No doubt, thought is difficult to kill, and every inquisition has its limits. Artful reasoners of the type of Gassendi or Mersenne found it easy to throw dust in the eyes of their censors, and pretend that their most startling innovations had been forestalled by some unintelligible passage in one of Aristotle's less known works. But on less experienced shoulders tradition rested with a crushing weight. The least gleam of independent thought was cried down as no good sign in a young man's character—subversive of established institutions—tending to intellectual pride. Ignatius Loyola sternly denounced it as the very tap-root of disobedience; whereas, to give up forming opinions of one's own on disputed points of scholarship was in his view a sacrifice peculiarly acceptable to the God of Wisdom.

From the tyranny of the expert was but one step to the tyranny of the official. Systems soon hardened into schools, and schools into powerful corporations, each with its own vested interests in darkness. 'Quid de medicina nostra fiet?' asked many a college of physicians, on hearing of Robert Harvey's discoveries about the blood. Members answered that they would rather err with Galen than circulate with Harvey—all the more readily, since *circulator* is low-Latin for

a tramp. To interpret truth thus became the monopoly of certain privileged bodies, whether they called themselves college of cardinals or faculty of medicine. They might be composed of capable men, or they might not ; that mattered little, since their authority flowed not from their competence, but from their official position. Common sense quite approved the arrangement. Why were the colleges there, unless they understood their business ? If they went wrong, who was left to put them right ? In short, authority was worshipped just because it was authority—tradition, because it was tradition. ' What pleases me most about my Son,' says Dr. Diafoirus in the ' Malade Imaginaire,' ' is that he is blindly attached to the opinions of the Ancients, and that he would never comprehend nor hear the Reasons and Experiments of our age concerning the circulation of the Blood, or other opinions of the same stamp.'

Thus Galileo and his followers were driven into violent protest—much as Luther had protested a hundred years before—against the ' vile habit of believing ' begotten of scholastic methods. They felt the foundations of authoritative science giving way under their feet. Why should they bow down to Aristotle ? He was a man like other men. What proof was there that the schoolmen understood him ? They differed violently about his meaning. But, even when he spoke quite clearly, was it certain he was right ? In the matter of falling bodies Galileo had proved him wrong, and he might be wrong again. Was, then, certainty an ideal beyond our reach ? Many writers thought it was, and echoed the mournful conclusion of Francis Sanchez that man was certainly born for knowledge, but that, in his present state, the gates of knowledge were inexorably barred against him. But bolder spirits refused to submit so tamely to defeat. They were not bloodless metaphysicians anxiously probing the inmost recesses of the human mind ; they were lusty adventurers born into an age of limitless

discovery. Columbus had called into being one new world. Galileo had opened up another; the development of the microscope was laying bare a third. They were resolved to live and learn all there was to know.

What, then, should be their test of truth? For lack of more impressive criteria, they saw themselves thrown back on their individual judgment. Timidly enough at first, but soon with an increasing note of defiance, they preached that an honest man must brace up his courage to decide for himself, and hold such opinions as he thought true for no other reason than because he thought them true, reason being his sole law. Soon appeared Descartes and his *Cogito*, as a rationalistic counterpart to Lutheran justification by faith. Both deny that certitude can be gained by conforming one's beliefs to a standard fixed by others; if a man's faith is really to be living, he must create it for himself afresh—whether it be faith in the saving power of Christianity or in the truth of mathematics. Both insist that the only convictions really worth having are those a man has won for himself by the hard sweat of his brow. 'So far from making hearsay the rule of your beliefs,' writes Pascal, 'you ought to approach a question as though you had never heard of it before. It is the consent of yourself to yourself and the unchanging voice of your own reason that ought to make you believe,—not the voices of other men.' To listen to their voices was no merit, but a crime. Not a few of his French contemporaries might have said with John Milton: 'A man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believes things because his pastor says so, or the assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.'

If a man's first duty is to exercise his judgment, it is manifest that he may suspend it on occasion. Doubt ceased to be a crime. To churchmen the doubting habit of mind

had been even more intolerable than independent thought itself. Accustomed to look everywhere for an immediate rule of practical guidance, they could not away with the slow march of science, its stuttering hesitations and provisional replies. They said that life was meant for action, not for speculation; a man must make haste to choose his side, knowing that on that choice depended an eternity of weal or woe. Nor did it trouble them if his decision was reached after hasty, superficial inquiry. Unconsciously they let themselves be biassed by a false ethical analogy. As it is unquestionably meritorious to effect much with insufficient tools, so they thought it must be right to believe much on scanty proof. Then, too, they were led astray by the moral beauty of belief. To the acrid, critical, scientific spirit, always haggling over technicalities of evidence, they opposed the impulsive, trustful temper of mind, that squanders its *credos* and its alms with equal generosity. To Galileo and his friends, however, such arguments were no arguments at all. Once and for all, they refused to subordinate their science to any moral end outside itself. An honest search for truth was its own full, perfect and sufficient justification; and truth, as Pascal said, only reveals herself to those who make it their rule to assent to none but certain propositions, and refuse either to affirm or to deny whenever the evidence is doubtful.

This stern sense of the value of facts kept scepticism at a distance. Pascal will one day have dealings with 'Pyrrhonists' too indolent to make up their minds; but Pyrrhonism would be sought in vain among the strenuous members of the Paris Club. Their doubts were a stimulant, not an opiate—a means of rousing themselves and their fellows out of the dogmatic slumber where everything is taken for granted. They were only continuing the work that Giordano Bruno had begun, when he cried to the scholastic professors: 'Inasmuch as the very pinnacle of ignorance is taking

doubtful things for certain, I beseech you, let us for one moment think, suppose, pretend, that we are thorough ignoramuses. Perhaps we shall gain in wisdom and insight, if we find that hitherto we have been taking darkness—or, at any rate, faint twilight glimmerings—for noonday. Then we shall either go back to our first opinion, and hold it much more firmly than before ; or else we shall recognise that we were blind, and exchange it for a better.' Herein earnest Christians like Mersenne were at one with the martyr of free thought. The good priest thoroughly agreed that nothing was more absurd than the ' foolish and pedantic affectation ' of taking everything for certain ; the doubts of the sceptics were a thousand times to be preferred to the dogmatism of the other philosophical schools. In other words, he recognised that science knows no prescriptive rights. It holds that traditions—so far from acquiring credibility by growing older—are apt to lose whatever element of truth they once possessed under the reckless guardianship of successive generations. Hence Mersenne and his brethren of the club were always ready for an inquiry into anything. But they were none of them iconoclasts. Blaise Pascal speaks for them all when he says : ' I hold that we ought not lightly to depart from accepted beliefs, unless obliged by clear and cogent proof. In that case it seems to me the height of cowardice to have the least scruple about it ; for to defend established opinions merely because they are established is a sign of obstinacy rather than reverence for truth.'

The dogmatists might talk as they pleased about their one unchanging, supernatural dispensation, and contrast it with the variableness and uncertainty that clouds a merely human wisdom. Science, again speaking through the mouth of Blaise Pascal, answered that to enchain man within the iron circle of his present knowledge was not to make him little lower than the angels, but to degrade him to

the level of the brutes. 'It is the peculiar privilege of human reason to be ever on the increase; whereas the instinct of the beasts moves unendingly along one plane. A thousand years ago bees built their hives no worse than now; their hexagon of comb was just as neatly formed the first time as the last. Nature so contrives her hints as just to keep pace with their necessities; and with the satisfaction of their needs that fragile knowledge dies away. Such is not the case with man, who was created only for infinity. He begins life in a state of boundless ignorance, but throughout his career he learns incessantly; for he draws not only on his own experience, but on the experience of those who went before him. We of the present day stand where the ancient philosophers would have stood, had they lived until our time, busy from age to age in adding to their original stock of wisdom. Nay, our whole race, in the long course of its history, may be likened to a single man, continually alive and continually learning. How unjust, then, is the reverence we pay to the sages of old time. They lived during the childhood of the world, and were novices in everything. We ourselves, who have added the experience of many centuries to theirs, have by far the better title to that name of ancient, which we give to them.'

Still, Blaise and his masters only aspired to free a limited field from the control of the dead hand. Discoverers rather than philosophers, their interest did not go beyond the constructive sciences; critical domains, like philology or history, they willingly left to the professors. 'If one wants to know who was the first king of France, or where geographers place the first meridian, or what words were in use in a dead language, whither should one go, except to books?' Blaise Pascal asks—not without the implication that on matters so supremely unattractive one book was as good as another, and the methods of Scaliger neither better nor

worse than the methods of Salmasius. Besides, all these inquiries started from some musty, old tradition; and Blaise was a servant of geometry—a science, as he had already told the Lord Chancellor, whose peculiar privilege it was to advance nothing that it could not prove. History began with an act of faith in the veracity of some ancient chronicler; whereas geometry involved no acts of faith at all. Its demonstrations lay absolutely open to the eye of reason, from the first enunciation of the problem to the final Q.E.D. Hence it could afford to bid tradition a lasting farewell. 'In physics,' Pascal told his Jesuit antagonist, Father Noel, 'we pay no attention to authorities. If we refer to earlier writers at all, we quote their demonstrations, not their names.'

In other words, science must be free from all authority except its own; and the great quarrel with the Aristotelians arose because they would not recognise this independence. For theology, as such, the club had an unfeigned respect, and nothing was farther from its thoughts than religious innovation; every member took to heart the advice a Roman prelate once gave Galileo—to philosophise as much as he pleased, so long as he kept outside the sacristy. A rough dividing-line was drawn between such facts as could be proved by reason, and such as could not. The former the club kept within its own jurisdiction; the latter were sacred mysteries belonging to the Church. Here authority was needful, because the facts passed all human understanding; whereas authority was useless, whenever reason could be set to work. 'We must deplore,' wrote Pascal, after his first Jansenist conversion, 'the blindness of those who settle physical questions by authority, instead of reasoning or experiment; and we must reprobate the malice that brings argument to bear on theology, in place of Scripture and the Fathers.' What he and his colleagues could not tolerate was the scholastic tendency to confuse the two

domains, and illegitimately deduce—as Descartes said—wrong opinions in physics from the words of Scripture. Clerical encroachments on its sphere were welcomed with ironical deference by the elder members of the club. When the cardinals condemned Galileo, Descartes said that their judgment would have as much influence on his public declarations as reason had upon his private thoughts. Mersenne explained that, of course, the Church must be right—though, to be sure, the arguments of the heliocentric party were hard to answer, and nobody would be damned for inability to refute them. The younger generation was much more outspoken. Blaise, who was ten years old when the condemnation was pronounced, grew up to place it almost on the same lines as the condemnation of Jansen—a fact all the more significant, since he thought, on scientific grounds, that Galileo had not fully proved his case. 'Decrees from Rome,' he told the Jesuits in the Provincial Letters, 'will not keep the earth stationary on its axis. If scientific observation proves that it moves, all the men on it will not stop it from moving, or themselves from moving with it.'

Following on this breach with the past came a new mode of scientific inquiry. The scholastic logic had been a highly elaborated technique accessible only to a few; and those few were generally so much encumbered by the complexity of their own procedure as to have little leisure to spare for getting at the facts beneath. But now a belief in 'Nature' was springing up—that is, in lay intelligence. It was thought that honest, reasonable laymen could solve important questions for themselves without professional assistance. Descartes wrote in French, instead of Latin, because he did not wish to have book-worms for his critics, but readers of average understanding. His great complaint against the professors was that they had always preferred the complex to the simple, the difficult to the easy. In the wish to seem

subtle and profound, they had passed by, as unworthy of notice, the truths immediately under their feet. And it was precisely among these simple, commonplace truths that Descartes hoped to find the key of knowledge. To grasp them nothing was needed but good sense ; and of all human qualities good sense was the most evenly distributed. It was, as Descartes said himself, the one thing that people generally difficult to satisfy never desired a larger share of than they already had. Philosophers only differed from the rest of mankind in that their good sense moved in a more orderly, systematic fashion. Descartes himself, who was not a modest man, attributed his own discoveries to the excellence of his methods much more than to anything extraordinary in his brain.

Thus simplicity became the note of the new logic. 'I doubt not,' cried Blaise Pascal, 'that its rules must be unsophisticated, clear and natural. *Barbara* and *baralipton* will not teach us reasoning. We must not screw our mind too high. Straining ambition ends in laughable pretentiousness, and a bombast foreign to our nature. The mind prefers a swollen, windy diet to solid, wholesome food.' Still, even a 'natural' system of logic does not spring fully armed from any man's brain. Its first principles must be taken over from some already existing science, and in the early seventeenth century that science could only be geometry. Its two characteristics were its clearness and its certainty, and both were guaranteed by its method. First it analysed every conception down into its simplest elements —notions of space, body, and the like—all of them so axiomatically clear that it seemed useless to dissect them further. 'Nature herself,' as Pascal said, 'has given us a surer insight into their meaning than philosophers could furnish by the most artistic definition.' This foundation once laid, mathematics proceeded to build upon it, admitting only so much as immediately followed from the original truth.

Thus the reasoner held certainty within the hollow of his hand. He need only let his mind run up and down the chain of arguments to feel sure that neither the chain itself, nor any single link thereof, could possibly be otherwise than they were. Indeed, the more enthusiastic geometers maintained that mathematical reasoning was a kind of spontaneous generation. Of their own free motion, as it were, and without the interference of the mind, these primary truths gave birth to others, as certain as themselves; and the whole work of science lay in watching these first simple axioms unfold into truths increasingly complex, just as naturally as a single seed breaks into stems and buds and roots. Thus mathematical reasoning became as certain as the course of nature herself; one demonstration succeeded another, as summer follows spring.

Here, then, was the model dialectic our inquirers sought. Cast any argument into a mathematical mould, and its certainty and clearness were alike assured; the spirit the reasoner must imbibe was the geometrical spirit. 'All the world,' will one day cry Blaise Pascal, 'seeks a safeguard against mistakes. Logicians profess to offer it; geometers alone succeed. Outside their science, and such others as follow it, there are no real demonstrations. The whole art of reasoning is contained in its precepts. They alone suffice; they alone can prove; all other rules are mischievous or useless. This I know from a long experience both of books and men.' Hence the geometrical enthusiasm of the century—an enthusiasm that took the strangest forms. It ranges from Spinoza's attempt to work out the mathematics of the Love of God down to the exploits of Sir Hudibras, who,

> by geometric scale
> Could take the size of pots of ale.

The great Jansenist, Antoine Arnauld, applied geometry to morals in his 'Dissertation selon la méthode des géomètres

pour la justification de ceux qui emploient, en écrivant, des termes que le monde estime durs' ; where he proves by A + B that it is sometimes right to say hard things of the Society of Jesus. Mersenne, still more greatly daring, proposed to introduce geometry into theology itself, and pressed on the superiors of religious houses a consideration of the question whether the saintly could not multiply their merits in geometrical progression.

Behind Mersenne's froth, however, lay a serious purpose. The geometrical spirit was not always lovely, when embodied in concrete flesh and blood. It fostered a temper of mind masculine to the point of aggressiveness, prone to criticise and cross-examine, exceedingly full of belief in itself, and exceedingly intolerant of all it did not understand. And it was quite as merciless in self-defence as in attack. It never brought forward a thesis without proving at inordinate length that every word it said had been correctly reasoned out from unexceptionable first principles. When Pascal presently forsakes the Paris Club for the world of salons and society, his fashionable friends will groan beneath his 'long demonstrations drawn out line by line.' Yet the demonstrations had their use. Men of science had many new truths to teach the world ; but, before they could expect the world to listen, they must inspire public confidence in their methods. They must show that they were not throwing over traditional opinions out of mere caprice, that Galileo's conclusions rested on quite as sound a chain of argument as Aristotle's own. Hence the need of making clear that they took never a word on trust, left nothing unexplained. But if the new philosophy was long-winded, it had one enormous advantage over the old. To follow the scholastic reasonings required a long and tedious apprenticeship, whereas the methods of the geometrical spirit could be understood by anyone. The whole secret lay in building up elaborate theories by slow and stately deduction from

some self-evident commonplace. And in practised hands the commonplaces proved anything but barren. Give Descartes matter and motion, and he will construct the world. Grant to Jean Jacques Rousseau that all men are born free and equal, and he will draw out with infallible precision the only possible form that a civilised society can assume. No wonder if the geometrical spirit seemed capable of moving mountains. 'It is the last word in philosophy,' cries Condorcet. 'It is enough of itself to raise an eternal barrier between the human race and the hoary errors of its childhood.'

CHAPTER IV

UNIVERSAL MECHANISM

'I HAVE often wondered,' wrote Father Mersenne about the time of Pascal's birth, 'whether it would be possible to put morals on the same footing as physics and mathematics, and proceed by *a priori* reasoning and efficient causes, instead of doing like Aristotle and his disciples, and always looking to the final end.'[1] As regards morals, Mersenne's hope was doomed to disappointment; but he lived long enough to help much in driving final causes from the domain of natural science. The first achievement of the geometrical spirit was to sweep away the old scholastic doctrine of the purpose. According to that doctrine the universe was created for the sake of Christian man, and all things in it must be explained with reference to this final end. Indeed, scholastic thought was primitive enough to credit the stocks and stones themselves with dim, half-human consciousness of their mission; the old adage that nature abhors a vacuum was treated as a literal truth. And what was meant by this 'abhorrence,' Dr. Guiffart, the Rouen friend of the Pascals, shall explain. 'Belief in the impossibility of a vacuum is so generally held, and so obstinately defended, by all who follow the most famous of philosophers, that they would rather see the world return to primeval chaos than take one step towards admitting it. From centre to

[1] *Impiété des Déistes*, Paris, 1624, i. p. 39.

circumference, they hold that nature is one vast expanse of bodies, all joined together so exactly as to leave no room for any empty space between them. If such space were possible it would certainly be large, terms like *more* or *less* having no meaning for a vacuum, which is pure nothingness and negativity. And as it finds no place in nature, so also it can offer no support to other bodies. Thus its introduction would disturb the nice adjustment whereby they all balance and sustain each other; the whole universe would fall together like a house of cards. To prevent this, nature has given each and every body a particular inclination, in satisfying which it incidentally subserves her purpose. But she has further given the bodies a second inclination —common to all alike, and often at variance with the first— to support her in the resolution never to endure a vacuum. Thus heavy bodies have an inclination to descend, light bodies to mount up; while the two fluids, air and water, act as the prompt and eager couriers of nature in filling up spaces that would otherwise be empty. Hence if violence be offered, and attempts be made to force a vacuum upon her, all these bodies are equipped in her defence. Sacrificing their private interests to the common good, they abandon their natural inclination—nay, if need be, they assume its opposite; for they would rather die than fail to defend the Mistress of the Universe against the onslaughts of their deadly enemy.' [1]

However picturesque this theory, it was a serious obstacle to science. In the first place it explained obscure things by obscurer. How could a stone have 'inclinations'; and if it had, how could it set about their gratification? Had it, as Blaise Pascal asked, arms or legs or nerves? Further, scholastic utterances were dangerously final. Horror of a vacuum amply accounted for the wish of heavy bodies to fall. Accordingly it was assumed as an ultimate fact that

[1] Guiffart, *Discours du Vide* (Rouen, 1648), pp. 15–26.

such bodies have a natural propensity for falling ; but what exactly ' heaviness ' implied, and why it should be connected with falling, were questions scholasticism left unanswered. Its work was done, once it had determined the inclination—that is, the purpose—of an object, and referred this to its place in the general economy of creation. Thus the doctors in the ' Malade Imaginaire ' ask why opium sends their patients to sleep, and think they have exhausted the subject when they answer : ' Because it has dormitive virtue.' For it never occurred to the Paris faculty that a single object could be intended for more purposes than one, or that opium might have properties which were not sedative. Antimony—discovered about the beginning of the seventeenth century—was a poison, and could not be anything but poisonous. The idea that it might be beneficial, when administered in moderate quantities, was only slowly making its way in the very teeth of scholastic medicine.

Geometry soon convinced Diafoirus and his brethren of screwing whatever minds they had too high, in that they asked the difficult question, Why, before they had satisfied themselves as to the simpler matter of How. Besides, not only the ' virtues ' and the ' inclinations ' but the whole scholastic fabric crumbled at a touch, once its foundations were laid bare. It was built up on nothing more solid than a huge conjecture as to the supposed intentions of the Deity in creating the world ; and to mathematicians conjectural knowledge is no knowledge at all. How did we know, asked Descartes, why the universe was created ? Had God called the schoolmen to his council-board ? How dare they assume that the firmament was created only for our use ? Was God so greedy of human praise, that He designed the sun and moon merely to get our thanks ? What, then, could be known for certain about material bodies ? Geometry was not slow in answering : their mathematical relations. Science might not be able to explain why

keys had 'aperitive virtue'; it might fairly hope to calculate the exact amount of force involved in the principle of the lever. Hence the enthusiasm of the new school for weights and measures; Galileo, its patriarch, cannot be thought of without his compasses and scales. In his eyes all the activities of nature were movements in space and time, and therefore fell under the jurisdiction of the man of science; his only business was to measure them, and thence infer their formula, or 'law.' Some definite formula there must be; for Nature was herself a mathematician, who kept to one invariable rhythm. To discover its mathematical equivalents, and thus 'bind together in one faggot' whole masses of isolated facts, seemed to Galileo not only a useful, but a pious task. Mathematical language, in its crystal clearness and rigidity, symbolised the one unchanging Law of God, and enabled man to see the universe as He sees it, free from the shifting clouds of sense.

If mathematics held the place of honour in Galileo's heart—because the cord, that binds the faggots, is more important than the individual sticks—they did not stand alone. Calculation must everywhere be controlled by observation of concrete facts; otherwise it would be like the spiders which Francis Bacon denounced—for ever spinning systems sound enough in logic, but utterly out of touch with the realities of things. Galileo accordingly turned to experiment—that is, to disciplined observation; and he showed a marvellous power of divining exactly what experiment would best determine the crucial point. In all this he was a pioneer. The very idea of appealing to experiment, as a serious test of truth, is no older than the seventeenth century, and still had many prejudices to overcome. Good Aristotelians pointed out how undignified it was for a learned man to leave his study, and fumble with weighing machines and blow-pipes, just like any common mechanic. They

never descended to such meannesses. On the few occasions when a practical demonstration could not be avoided—as, for instance, in anatomical lectures—the professor thundered from his desk above, while a servant stood below, and plied the scalpel under his orders. Herein some of Aristotle's worst enemies agreed for once with the Peripatetics. Experiment holds a very humble place in Descartes' system of investigation; and his great disciple, Malebranche, could seldom forego an eerie shudder, as he saw dead matter slowly conforming to laws already marked out by thought.

Not that Descartes was the visionary dreamer it pleases popular fancy to imagine: his objects were as practical as Francis Bacon's own. If he studied Nature, it was in order to reform the natural sciences, more especially medicine and mechanics, and such others as touch closely on human life. But whereas Galileo had held the balance between mathematics and experiment, Descartes was wholly mathematical—resolute, as he said himself, to force on physics the language of geometry. For this there were several reasons. He was a Frenchman, with all his country's love of broad, decisive generalities. He wished, as he said, to deduce effects from causes, not causes from effects—that is, to deal only with the general principle, and let the details take care of themselves. Galileo's teasing experiments were not for him. They were fragmentary; they were inconclusive; they left their work half-done. They were excellent in determining when and how a thing happened; but why it happened they could not tell. And Descartes was just as impatient as any schoolman to get on from how to why. He was a public character, bound to speak out with no uncertain voice. Scholasticism was the enemy; friends like Mersenne were always telling him that the time had come to make an end of it; and that he was the man to strike the final blow on behalf of truth and wisdom.[1] Officially, Descartes declined

[1] Baillet, ii. p. 86.

the invitation. He said that the best way to refute the schoolmen was to appear politely ignorant of their existence. Really, however, he so drew out his own philosophy (not without a hope of seeing it adopted by more enlightened universities and religious orders) as to meet and turn 'Stagyrolatry' at every point. He posed, in fact, as a kind of anti-Aristotle, much as Loyola thought himself the anti-Luther, or Metternich the anti-Buonaparte. Hence he easily descended to fight scholasticism with its own weapons. It was dogmatic: he must be equally dogmatic. It professed to explain the universe in general, and all that was therein; he must leave no single point without an explanation. And in this article he had his reward. His bitterest critics cannot deny that scholasticism soon crumbled away wherever Cartesian principles made their entrance.

For Cartesianism professed to build up a complete philosophy of the universe on absolutely sure foundations. What could be known for certain about an external world? Following his usual practice, Descartes began by putting aside all information of dubious pedigree. The evidence of the senses was immediately ruled out of court. These are subjective—in us, and not in the things that cause them. They do not tell us whence they come, nor why they vary, nor even whether they represent their originals correctly. Hence, if reality is to be reached, things must be stripped of every quality lent them by the senses. Take Descartes' own instance of a honeycomb. Its colour goes, for that is an affection of our retina. Its weight and malleability go, for they are relative to our muscles. Its present shape goes, for that would change—sense does not tell us how or why—if the wax was brought too close to a fire. Does, then, all our knowledge melt with it? No. Quite apart from the evidence of our senses, we have certain 'clear ideas'—intuitions common to every rational being, and so luminous and self-evident as to be beyond the reach of doubt. One of

these tells us the bare fact that an external world exists. But if material bodies exist at all, they must be extended in space. Being extended, they must have some sort of figure, however often that figure may vary. And as, in order to be, they must be somewhere, they can always be thought of as moved to somewhere else. Accordingly in these three things—extension, figure, motion—abides the ultimate reality of the whole material universe. Hence the Cartesian doctrine of universal mechanism. However diversified its play may seem to sense, the world of bodies knows but one activity : upon a background of extended matter motion is for ever determining new figures. This is the meaning of Descartes' famous boast—one of the most tremendous ever made by mortal man. 'Give me matter and motion,' he said, 'and I will construct the world.'

Hence a final disappearance of the whole scholastic apparatus of 'purposes' and 'virtues.' Galileo had left them on one side ; Descartes destroyed them by explaining them away. All material activities of every sort were caused by matter and motion ; and inasmuch as both of these were absolutely homogeneous and simple, there could be none but differences of quality between one object and another. Trees did not grow, nor pebbles fall, because they had an 'inclination' to do so. Being simply bundles of matter, they could have no propensities at all. The reason why the tree mounts, and the pebble descends, is simply that the quantity of motion which impels the one upwards, and the other down, is greater than the quantity of motion acting in the opposite direction. But quantities can always be expressed in numbers ; and once science knows the way the numbers combine, it can calculate exactly the rate at which the tree will grow, or the pebble fall. Hence the practical advantage of introducing numbers everywhere, since power of forecast is power of control ; and this was the object of Cartesian physics. Light and heat were

resolved into mechanism of molecular vibration—'a movement of globules,' says Blaise Pascal, 'and the pleasure they give a mere *ballet des esprits*,' or dance of nervous currents.[1] Animals were automata—machines—and so was the human body itself. 'All its movements,' says Descartes, 'follow naturally from the sole disposition of its organs, just as the movements of a clock follow naturally from the arrangement of its weights and wheels. So that there is no reason to suppose any principle of movement in the body, other than the blood and its animal spirits, agitated by the heat of the fire which burns continually in the heart, and which does not differ in nature from any of the other fires met with in inanimate bodies.'[2] In short, the whole universe was mechanism, and the laws of nature were the same as those of mathematics.

Manifestly so vast a thesis could not be proved experimentally, in the way Galileo would have demanded; but for that Descartes did not care. Experiment was a mere affair of the senses, whereas universal mechanism rested on the surer basis of a metaphysical necessity of thought. Fully satisfied, Descartes proceeded to derive from his fundamental principle various corollaries as certain as itself. One was that the world is infinite, since nothing authorises our mind to set limits to extension. Another was the impossibility of a vacuum—not, of course, because nature 'abhors' it in the scholastic sense—but simply because a space empty of extended matter would be outside the universe. The intervening spaces in his theory Descartes filled up with hypotheses—all of them brilliantly ingenious, though seldom able to boast of experimental verification. Hence they are often wide of the mark; and their aberrations would be greater still, had not Descartes' practice

[1] *Pens.* 368.

[2] Quoted by Michael Foster, *Lectures on the History of Physiology* (Cambridge, 1901), p. 267.

paid much more attention to experience than his principles demanded. Wherever it was there to guide him, his hypotheses steered a delicate middle course between the rights of universal mechanism on the one hand, and of observation on the other ; physical processes were described in the most mechanical manner that the facts would bear. Where facts were wanting, Descartes gave his mechanical propensities free rein. ' In order to make his expositions of the human machine clear and convincing,' says Michael Foster, ' he does not hesitate to attribute to its various parts features which he describes as though they belonged to the common knowledge of the time, although neither he nor anyone else had actually seen them.' [1] What degree of faith he expected such theories to gain it is not easy to determine. They began life as avowed conjectures. As they grew in number, they became mutually self-supporting. At last, in the hands of Descartes' disciples—naturally more Cartesian than their master—all trace of their hypothetical origin was lost.

The danger of this method was its greatest recommendation. On the imaginative and poetical side—as distinct from the side of prosaic achievement—no man ever did more than Descartes to further the advance of science. By preaching universal mechanism from the house-tops, by applying it recklessly on every side, he showed that a purely mechanical explanation of the universe was logically possible, however whimsical and mistaken some of his own theories might be. Even before the close of his own century men learnt to separate the shadow from the substance, and applaud his general design, without taking all the hypotheses quite seriously. ' Descartes was too clever,' wrote the greatest physiologist of the succeeding generation, the Dane, Nicholas Stensen, ' to explain the real nature of man. He is content

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 261.

to describe a machine capable of performing all the functions of which man is capable. He was the first who dared explain all the functions of man, and especially of the brain, in a mechanical manner. By means of this he opened up for us a way to investigate the other parts of the body, though it may be difficult to do so with the same clearness and fidelity.' [1]

Stensen, belonging to a later period, could afford to praise; but the contemporaries of the Paris Club saw matters in a different light. While Descartes was working out his abstract theories, they had been developing in an exactly opposite direction, and had embraced the experimental side of Galileo's teaching with all the zeal of neophytes. Even their interest in geometry relaxed, as they grew more and more wedded to their laboratory and its message of concrete, tangible fact. Mersenne himself was swept away by the current, and admitted that geometry had no advantage over physics or morals other than its greater certitude. He longed for the day when these latter sciences should be established on a basis as immovable 'both because they deal with matters more excellent than quantity, and because their principles are the real causes of their effects; whereas the principles of geometry are only causes of the conclusions we draw.' [2] In their interest he became the crusader of experimental science, and was for ever discovering outrages on his liege lady in the most unlikely quarters—as for instance in the devotional works of St. Francis of Sales. That great master of fanciful comparisons—drawing, as was his habit, on some scrap of legendary folk-lore—once said that covetousness kept souls back from God, as a diamond hinders the attraction of iron to the magnet. To which Mersenne indignantly replied that diamonds had no effect on attraction, as a very simple experiment would prove; it was

[1] Quoted: Michael Foster, *op. cit.* p. 62.
[2] *Questions Inouïes*, c. xix.

inexcusable in Monsieur de Sales to make such utterly baseless assertions on matters so easily put to the test.[1] And certainly, in stronger hands than his, experiment was a deadlier weapon than Cartesianism itself. Scholasticism never received a more resounding blow than Galileo's demonstrations on the Leaning Tower of Pisa—unless it was the investigations into atmospheric pressure, afterwards carried out by Blaise Pascal at the Puy-de-Dôme. 'You may call my son's experiments foolish and dishonest,' Stephen Pascal was one day to write to Father Noel; 'but permit me to tell you, Reverend Sir, that they have at any rate disarmed you, and forced you out of the school-philosophy you teach at Clermont College.'[2]

Aristotle was not the only victim. The younger members of the club soon began to turn their favourite weapon on the great contemner of experiment. At first they had welcomed Descartes as a prophet of deliverance out of the Egypt of scholasticism; and with his universal mechanism they had no quarrel, when regarded simply as the assumption from which all physical inquiry must start. Blaise Pascal was quite willing to agree *en gros*—in a general way—that figure and movement were the universal causes. And he even found Scriptural warrant for his thesis in the Book of Wisdom: 'Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight.'[3] But with Descartes universal mechanism was much more than a mere assumption; it was a metaphysical certainty guaranteed by supposed necessities of thought. The club had no love for such necessities, nor, indeed, for metaphysics at all; science had not escaped from its long bondage to the theologians only to enter on a new servitude to professors of philosophy. For, as time

[1] *Questions Inouïes*, c. xvi. The reference is to St. Francis, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, vii. c. 14.

[2] *Lettre au Père Noël*, *Works*, iii. p. 71.

[3] *Wisdom*, xi. 21, quoted by Pascal, in *Esprit Géométrique*, *Works*, ii. p. 168. See also *Pens.* 79.

went on, new Cartesian mechanism showed more and more tendency to resemble old scholastic purpose writ large. Already Gassendi was angrily complaining that Monsieur Descartes only made war on Aristotle, in the hope of seating his own theories in Aristotle's vacant chair. Gassendi's caustic pupil, Sorbière, declared that Aristotle himself did not ask for greater submissiveness from his disciples than did Monsieur Descartes. They must keep on absorbing his philosophy, until it had soaked through every winding of their brain. Often they ended by understanding it better than he did himself.[1]

And Pascal mocked at his 'universality,' just as Sorbière mocked at his dogmatism. Science was growing sick of grandiose systems—'fanciful endeavours to satisfy man's curiosity about the unknown, which, so far from increasing our knowledge, only serve to cloak the ignorance of their propounder, and to increase the ignorance of his disciples.'[2] With obvious reference to Descartes' 'Principia,' Pascal went on to urge that there was just as much idle parade in writing flashy treatises on the principles of philosophy as in the most flagrantly absurd scholastic thesis *de omni scibili*. But Descartes had done worse than make pontifical pronouncements on matters beyond our ken. He had laid down the law on matters where experiment could check him, and experiment had proved him wrong. Thus, his metaphysics requiring that the universe should be full, he had promptly invented a 'subtle matter' to fill it, and pronounced a vacuum impossible. Whereupon Pascal set to work to prove that a vacuum is not only possible, but actual matter of fact. As to the subtle matter, he simply laughed; and took the confusion between physical matter and geometrical space, which brought that imaginary substance into being, as his favourite example of the lengths to which

[1] Baillet, ii. pp. 169, 264.
[2] *Récit de l'Expérience du Puy-de-Dôme*, *Works*, iii. p. 146.

a hardened theorist could go. On many isolated points, it is true, he agreed with the Cartesians; but his final judgment on their master is recorded in the 'Pensées.' There the Christian pronounces Descartes 'useless' for salvation; but the experimentalist does not forget to add that he is also 'uncertain.' [1]

No doubt, such a verdict is more than a little unfair to Descartes; but men who spend their lives in a laboratory, slowly and painfully piecing together minute particles of truth, are never likely to be very respectful towards the cheap gains of *a priori* speculation. They know that in proportion as our knowledge advances—as universal mechanism itself is rightly understood—the more a final explanation of the world becomes a hopeless dream. 'All things being caused and causes, acted on and agents, mediate and immediate, and all being held together by a natural and invisible chain that links the farthest and the most unlike, I hold it impossible to understand the parts without a knowledge of the whole, or to know the whole without a thorough comprehension of the parts.' And that was beyond the power of man; that was where 'all the philosophers come to grief.' [2] Hence the strenuous efforts of the Paris Club to keep science out of their clutches. In a curious lecture, obviously aimed at the Cartesians, Roberval discusses the various branches of learning. Metaphysics he dismisses as a mere congeries of irresponsible fancies. Logic is full of traps, designed and undesigned. Morals leave far too large a place to accident and subjective caprice. Far above these stand mathematics. They are true, unchangeable and invincible within their own domain; but then, that domain only extends to abstractions, and stops short of the complexity of material things. Physics, on the other hand, deal with the contingent, and yet keep altogether free from the vagaries of individual taste. 'Dixi,' writes Roberval,

[1] *Pens.* 78. [2] *Pens.* 72.

'in rebus Physicis, quod verum fit aut falsum, non ab hominum voluntate, sed ab intrinseca rerum ipsorum natura pendere, quam mutare nobis non liceat, sed tantum quomodo illa se habent, investigare.'[1]

Here at last, then, men could feel that they were face to face with nature. Here at last they had shaken off that intrusive subjective element, which a theological Pascal will presently call the tyranny of the *Moi*. No wonder that physics seemed to them the queen of sciences. 'In vain men band together against her,' cries Roberval. 'She changes not for all the dreams of their hollow metaphysic. Morality may appeal to authority, to weight of numbers, to self-deception; she will ensure herself a certain fall, if she tries a bout with Physics. Although she is as ancient as the world, she never grows old, for time is but her vassal; she is as hoary in her methods as she is new in her results.'[2] And plainly she must be pursued in the most objective possible manner; weighing-machines and test-tubes must take the place of human theories and guesses. Pascal fitly ushers in the age of Otto Guericke and Robert Boyle, when he lays down that in physics experiment is our true master. Nay, the whole history of science during the latter half of the seventeenth century is one long commentary on the motto that introduces the *Experimenta Nova Magdeburgica* into the world. 'All philosophy, except it be supported by experiments, is empty, fallacious and useless. What monstrosities philosophers, in other respects of the highest and subtlest genius, may produce by neglecting experiment. Experience alone is the dissolver of doubts, the reconciler of difficulties, the sole mistress of truth, who holds a torch before us in obscurity, unties our knots, teaches us the true cause of things.'[3]

[1] *Seconde Narration sur le Vide*, printed in Brunschvicg's edition of Pascal, vol. ii. p. 332.

[2] *Fragment Inédit*, printed in Brunschvicg, ii. pp. 49, 50.

[3] Quoted: Whewell, *Philosophy of Discovery*, p. 169.

Still, the experimental zeal of Blaise Pascal was something more than a mere concession to the spirit of his time. It seems paradoxical to say of a great mathematician that his ruling passion was devotion to the concrete ; yet it was only the certainty of mathematics that induced Blaise to tolerate their abstractions. All his life long he preached that reasoning was like the giant Antæus—only strong while he kept close to the solid earth. To desert the positive facts of experiment for vague *a priori* generalisations seemed to Pascal far worse than useless ; it was a deliberate forsaking of the road appointed for our mind to travel. 'Nature,' he wrote, 'meant all her truths to be independent ; our art subordinates one to another. That is not natural ; each one ought to keep its place. "What ! A whole system comprised in a word !" you say. Perhaps ; but what is the good of that without an explanation ? And once you begin explaining you have to drop the general principle, and fall back on the individual facts. There you are, landed in the original confusion you were so anxious to avoid. The truth is you might just as well lock facts up in a box as hide them away behind the principle ; it is only in their primitive heterogeneous state that they can have any meaning for us.' [1]

This devotion to the concrete pursued him on to the mathematical field itself. Hence his life-long opposition to the methods of Descartes—first shown when he preferred Desargues as a guide in the matter of conic sections. Descartes' mathematical innovations were a direct consequence of his universal mechanism Inasmuch as all movements of every kind were products of a single cause, Descartes not only wished to measure them, but to compare the measurements themselves. 'I was not long in finding out,' he said, 'that all the so-called physical sciences agree in this, that they consider nothing but the relations or

[1] *Pens.* 20, 21.

proportions of their objects, whatever those objects may happen to be. Hence I thought it well to devote myself entirely to these proportions at large.' Behind the various sciences that treat of special kinds of magnitudes—space, or sound, or force—he had caught the outlines of an all-embracing science of magnitudes as such. From a combination of the data furnished by geometry, acoustics, and the rest, it would draw generalisations applicable to all these sciences, though wider than any of them could make on their more limited domain. In other words, it was to do the work nowadays performed by algebra. Algebra of a kind already existed, though in a very raw, imperfect state. Mathematicians had not yet learnt how to express the various sorts of magnitudes in a uniform language. Geometry, in particular, defied them. It was composed of figures and dimensions ; the dimensions could be expressed numerically, but the figures could not. Descartes met the challenge by inventing analytical geometry. Instead of waiting till the figure was drawn, he drew two fixed intersecting straight lines, called co-ordinate axes, and determined the position of any point in their plane by measuring its distance from the axes. Variations in its position were shown by changes in their distances, much as a rise or fall in the pressure gauge of an engine reflects the movements of the machinery. Thenceforward there is no more need to think of the figure as a concrete image ; an algebraical equation, connecting the co-ordinate of the moving point in all its positions take the place of the actual square or circle, and it becomes possible to compare different figures together by referring them to the same co-ordinate axes.

Fruitful as this invention was afterwards to prove, it met with little favour at the time. Old-fashioned mathematicians denied it as a device too clever to be honest. Many of them would not use algebra at all, holding it little better than a trick. Blaise Pascal stood by no means alone in preferring

the longest geometrical routes to the short and easy way pointed out by so dubious a guide. ' The close and grasping character of the ancient reasoning,' says Augustus de Morgan, ' did not accompany the new method. Algebra was rather a half-understood art than a science ; and all who valued strictness of demonstration adhered as close as possible to the ancient geometry.' For the most part, however, a mathematician of the ancient, or ' synthetic ' school steered altogether clear of the questions that had brought analytical geometry into being ; his business lay not with relative values, but with individual figures. These he studied in their whole length and breadth until they had yielded up all their secrets. It became a triumph to discover fresh unsuspected consequences lurking in a definition—much as commentators in another field pride themselves on seeing :

> Two points in Hamlet's soul
> Unseized by the Germans yet—

or to crystallise round some mystic hexagram a whole series of new truths. Blaise Pascal was a faithful mouthpiece of this spirit, when he deduces more than four hundred corollaries from one proposition in conic sections ; and the same influence runs through his speculations on number —for example, when he introduced his arithmetical triangle to the world with the declaration : ' I explain a few of its properties, but leave many more unnoticed. It is marvellous how rich this triangle is in properties ! There is room for everyone to discover fresh.' [1]

Thus the same causes kept Pascal attached to the ancient methods in geometry as made him an experimentalist in science and a Jansenist in religion. His interests were precisely opposed to the interests of Descartes. That philosopher was first and foremost a man of business. He had invented analytical geometry in the service of universal

[1] *Divers Usages du Triangle Arithmétique*, *Works*, iii. p. 251.

mechanism: he had formulated universal mechanism itself in the interests of practical scientific reform. Hence, he dealt largely in the general formulas, that bring a new discovery within the reach of commonplace intelligence. Analytical methods were developed and generalised, until they acted like a mill. Stripped of all but its essentials, the problem was put in at one end, and taken out again at the other, after undergoing an almost mechanical solution. But the geometers of the older school were anything but utilitarian. They collected quaint problems—'curiosities,' the scornful Descartes called them—much as other men might collect bric-à-brac or engravings; and they were proud of the limitation of their sciences, which obliged them to find a separate procedure for every question attacked. Blaise Pascal, in particular, was the sworn enemy of all machine-made solutions, whether given in answer to problems of Cartesian science or problems of Jesuit morality. This intellectual sportsman despised a mere result in comparison with the pleasure and healthy excitement of the chase; Then, too, he was attracted by the paradox of allying the most rigorous demonstration with freakish *tours de force*. From one inaccessible height to another he climbed, always by perfectly legitimate, but most unlikely routes, and he took a malicious pleasure in giving as few hints as possible to future mountaineers. But even this most individualistic of thinkers made one large contribution to the public good. Employment of Roberval's method of exhaustions led him to the threshold of the integral calculus; in technical language, he compared, transformed, and finally evaluated a large number of integrals. Yet he did so merely by the way, and without any thought of the general principle on which the calculus depends. To reach after such general principles would have meant desertion to the analytical camp; and though Pascal was willing enough to attack the favourite problems of the rival school, he did so in a spirit rigorously

synthetic. By what law bodies in general diminish infinitely he neither knew nor cared; his one concern was for the concrete bodies immediately under his hand. Thus it was almost against his will that he smoothed the path for Isaac Newton and Leibniz, and hence is reckoned among the founders of modern higher mathematics. 'The period between 1615 and 1668,' says the historian of that science, 'was dominated by the discovery of the calculus, and in this Frenchmen played the leading part. Two of them stand out pre-eminent—Fermat, in leading up to the differential calculus, and Pascal in leading to the integral.' [1]

Still such a mind is not easily bound down to any definite plan of research. Pascal much preferred to pose as the knight-errant of geometry, wandering hither and thither in search of questions hard enough to be worthy of his steel. Most of all, it pleased him to swoop down on questions that had already baffled others. As he began his mathematical career by improving on Desargues so he ended it by smoothing out Roberval's tangled speculations over the cycloid. Between these two came his disputes with Fermat—'nos coups fourrés,' his adversary called them—over mathematical probability and the theory of number. On this field alone he met with his match, as he himself most willingly acknowledged. 'I have dared to cross swords with you over probabilities,' he wrote to the judge, 'but for your speculations on number you must find another antagonist. They are far above my head. I can do nothing but admire, and beg you most earnestly to go on with them.'

Blaise, however, did not take these contests very seriously; to him they were in a literal sense 'fights with the gloves.' It was only during the early Desargues period that mathematics could offer him the two things he most needed—difficult problems and sure results. Before he

[1] Moritz Cantor, *Geschichte der Mathematik* (Leipzic, 1900), ii. p. 843.

left Rouen, he had come to see that there are more important things in the world than difficult mathematical problems; and his approaching first conversion is only the formal acknowledgment of this fact. 'In time of affliction,' he said (and affliction was soon in coming, in the shape of a long and wearisome illness), 'understanding of the natural world could not console me for ignorance of the moral; whereas understanding of the moral world would always console me for ignorance of the natural.' For Blaise was no laborious professor, content to sit for ever in his study, placidly inquiring information; every scrap of knowledge he possesses must immediately be translated into character, into life. And since mathematics are but a feeble guide to action, Blaise presently came to look upon them as having no more than an educational value as the envelope of the geometrical spirit. 'To tell you the truth,' he wrote to Fermat, 'I think geometry the finest training the human mind can have; but at the same time it seems to me so useless, that I scarcely trouble to distinguish between a geometer who is simply a geometer, and a clever artisan. It is the finest trade in the world, and nothing more than a trade—excellent, as I have often said, for us to try our wings on, but not fit to be the object of our flight. For my own part, I would not walk two steps for geometry, and I fancy you are very much of my opinion.' [1]

[1] Letter of 10th August, 1660, *Works*, iii. p. 237.

CHAPTER V

PRESIDENT DU VAIR

Until the close of their stay at Rouen, theological questions entered but little into the family life of the Pascals. Under the rule of Richelieu, most secular of cardinals, the Church by no means held the position it afterwards gained under Louis XIV. Middle-aged memories still went back to the Wars of Religion in the previous century, when France had been torn in two by dogmatic discord; and now that order was restored, most good Frenchmen had made up their minds that never again should dogma endanger the public peace. Catholicism, left outwardly on its throne, was brought under strict surveillance by the civil power; its profession was not so much a duty to God as a duty to the State. Not that any self-respecting man wished to call its doctrines in question. The age of passionate negation had not yet dawned; and scepticism of the lighter sort, though already common enough, was associated neither with sound learning nor with a reputable life. But the Church's hold on lay imaginations had seriously weakened, more especially in the cultivated bureaucratic class from which the Pascals sprang. Official guardians of the King's prerogative, these lawyers were always on the watch against the machinations of Rome; official guardians of the common law, they were for ever suspecting some new encroachment of the spiritual courts. Of this general mistrust of the clergy Gui Patin's

letters are only a half-humorous exaggeration—with their explosive diatribes against priests, monks, and especially 'that black Loyolitic scum from Spain,' which called itself the Society of Jesus. France would never have peace, he said, till she sent friars and friaresses packing off to the Isles of America, there to cultivate purgatory at their leisure. And his private confession of faith may claim, at least, the merit of brevity: 'Credo in Deum, Christum crucifixum, &c. . . . De minimis non curat prætor.'

Patin went farther than most of his class, but Patin was no sceptic. Jesters who made game of the kernel of religion, came quite as much under the lash of his tongue as bigots who dared defend its husks. He had a firm, though unconventional, belief in Providence. 'Non est currentis, neque volentis, sed Dei miserantis,' this incorrigible dealer in quotations was wont to say of human fate. So also with regard to immortality. 'One Ancient,' he writes with airy reference to Lucretius and Horace, 'says he would rather not die; although, once he was dead, he would know nothing about it. Another thinks that death is a gain, because there must be something beyond it. As for me, I say the same as my parish priest.' Not that he was in any hurry to discover whether the priest was right. 'Si post fata venit gloria, non propero,' was another favourite tag. Meanwhile he looked in hours of trouble to 'the three great judges mentioned by Apollonius: the Gods, Time and Philosophy.' And above his innumerable grumblings pierces a note of healthy Stoicism. 'Never will I repeat the craven lines:

> Quum rapiunt mala fata bonos, ignoscite fasso,
> Sollicitor nullos esse putare deos.

I am much more tempted to cry: "O bone Romule, ista videbis et feres."'

Much more conventional minds than his sat very loose

to Church observances. Listlessness naturally followed on the popular belief—already impressed by Stephen Pascal on his children—that faith and reason had nothing to do with each other. No doubt, Stephen's son will one day give this maxim a new and tremendous spiritual significance; but on the father's lips it meant no more than that Catholicism need not be suffered to invade the sphere of daily life. Its place was on Sundays and State-occasions, such as the crisis of domestic history commemorated in Jacqueline's verse. Quite a large proportion of her poems deal with sacred subjects. On the death of a Huguenot friend she consoled herself with the reflection that there might, perhaps, be paths to Heaven uncharted on the Roman maps; and in thanking God for her recovery from the smallpox, she assured Him that the resulting scars would be guardians of her innocence. But this last phrase is not due so much to morbid piety as to a *précieux* habit of using language vaguely felt to be fine without much inquiry into its meaning. At this time she certainly had small wish to emulate the Lives of the Saints. Although by no means anxious to marry, she was quite determined not to take the veil; because she thought conventual practices unsuited to a reasonable mind. And so little did Church matters attract her that she was over twenty before she offered herself for Confirmation. The truth is that in families like hers a new lay religion was springing up—the religion of Gui Patin's letters—quite independent of Catholicism, although not yet its conscious rival. In the future its prophet will be Descartes; at present its leaders were men like Guillaume du Vair, successively a chief justice, lord keeper, and bishop, and one of the foremost men in France during her father's youth.

A papal legate once described Du Vair as an ancient Stoic in judicial ermine, whose only god was the temporal glory of France. In other words, he was a patriotic moralist,

who had known the horrors of the Wars of Religion, and was burning to rally all good men to the service of their country. Dogma had divided, but sense of duty should unite them on a basis of purely rational morality. In general sentiment this would be Christian, but it must carefully avoid all points at issue between Huguenots and Leaguers. For these Du Vair cared little enough. 'The wise man,' he wrote, 'is the only true sacrificer of the great God, whose spirit is His temple, whose soul His image, whose affections His offering, whose greatest and most solemn sacrifice is His imitation. Not that you are not to perform the ancient ceremonies of your country with a decent moderation void of excess or avarice; but you are to perform them with this opinion that God will be observed of the spirit.' The corner-stone of Du Vair's religion is harmony—that is, love of order, sense of duty. And, lest any man should escape him in an age when everything was called in question, Du Vair forswore scholastic generalities, and dealt experimentally with human nature. In his own words, he founded on man the greatness of man.

Nor did he hesitate to start with an analysis of our grosser pleasures. What is there in them that attracts us? What but a certain harmony between our desires and their realisation? But how pitiful appear such harmonies beside the mighty order of Nature. And yet greater than that order itself is the intellect that perceives it; from a study of external things the mind rises to a study of itself. 'More magnificent than them all, it embraces heaven and earth, puts a girdle round the world, knows all that may be known, and is so beautiful that, were its first loveliness but kept untarnished, all the fine things of this vile earth would seem ugly and misshapen beside it.' Still the quest is not yet over. 'Having contemplated itself and been exercised in the search for origins and causes, our soul finds nothing to assuage its thirst for knowledge, and is constrained to rise

above the world—above itself—and let the works conduct it to the Workman. Then we shall enter into the workhouse where so many rare objects have been fashioned. We shall gaze at the models, we shall handle the tools, we shall hold familiar converse with the Artificer Himself. He will do more than show us His labours, more than unravel His designs. He will teach us His art and His science, and make us perfect and divine.'

Knowledge of the harmonies is only vouchsafed us that we may embody them in our lives. The real strength of Du Vair lay in his ethical enthusiasm. In days when Philip II and Henry III were showing that it was possible to combine the minutest reverence for every ritual precept of the Church with utter indifference to the law of God, Du Vair came forward to proclaim that religion without morality was nothing worth. Nay, it could not so much as exist; for this devotee of Epictetus everywhere inclined to follow the practice of his Stoic masters, and made faith a means to virtue rather than virtue a means to faith. On his principles Christianity teaches nothing new; its whole work is to consecrate and continue what Nature has begun. As on the domain of faith it 'fans our first instinctive sparks of hope in immortality into a clear and lambent flame,' so on the domain of conduct it warms chill, Stoical precepts of benevolence into 'a charity that exacts the love of our fellow-men.' But although religion is the chief good, there are other goods beside it; virtue can offer prizes of her own not wholly incommensurable with the rewards of faith. 'Those who rightly play their part are like singers in a chorus. Beside the contentment they receive from letting their voice ring sweetly forth, they feel a great and incredible delight, when their music accords with the music of others, and sinks into a cadence full of melody and sweetness. Truly it is pleasant to do well, and there is no rapture to compare with the inward

peace we feel after performing some good and laudable action.'

Thus courageous self-dependence was the watchword of Du Vair. 'Let us gaily follow our wise Captain, Who loves us so well. If He leads us into the fight, He also leads us to victory. We shall stand up the stouter for the blows that are dealt us; by our endurance we shall weary evil, and thus snatch victory out of defeat.' For all this Providence has furnished us with amply sufficient powers. It is true that our reason is sometimes perplexed, and then recourse may be had to prayer—that, 'as the corporal sun shines daily on our bodies, so may the Sun of Wisdom shine upon our minds.' But help from Above we do not need. 'If there is any truth more necessary than another, it is that our will is free;' while another 'holy and inviolable maxim, established since the first beginnings of the world, declares that, if we would possess any good, we must acquire it for ourselves.' On these central axioms—as Pascal will presently explain to the Jansenist priest, De Saci—rest the whole of Du Vair's theology. Life, fortune, honour are beyond our control; therefore they do not lead to God. Will and reason, on the other hand, must lead to Him, because they are free; our reason cannot be forced to believe what it knows to be untrue, nor can our will be made to love what it knows will prove to its hurt. Through them, therefore, we can make ourselves holy and friends of God.

That Du Vair should leave the individual soul wholly master of its fate was quite in keeping with the spirit of the time. The Middle Ages had thought and lived and moved in groups, but now an almost aggressive independence was everywhere in fashion. At all costs, men must be original, and strike out new lines of their own. For the great families still set the fashion in matters of moral and social taste; and most of the nobles were rough soldiers

brought up amid memories of the Wars of Religion. Their abiding representative is the finest outcome of those wars, King Henry of Navarre. Henry—or rather Henry's ghost, sanctified by the murderer's dagger—became the idol of his people to a degree hard for us Englishmen to understand; for more than a generation after his death the virtues of her Re Galantuomo remained the darling virtues of France. These were capacity to take a side, and fight for it, dash, resourcefulness and energy, willingness to undertake responsibility—all qualities that go towards what philosophers call self-realisation, and common sense simply call making a *man*. Corneille was the high priest of this worship: what are his plays but a panegyric on the freedom of the will? No less than his heroes, his great ladies all rise above the tyranny of circumstance.

> Fortune, quelques maux que ta rigeur m'envoie,
> J'ai trouvé les moyens d'en tirer de la joie,

cries Sabine in 'Horace'; while Dirce in 'Œdipus' replies:

> Je suis fort peu de chose,
> Mais enfin de mon cœur moi-même je dispose.

Not that these two were driven on by violence of passion. In that iron-nerved generation sentiment was no quality to boast of, but rather matter for reproach. Du Vair and the Stoical moralists condemned it altogether. 'The flowers of Egypt, being continually charged and watered by the vapours of Nilus, which are gross and earthly, yield not such pleasant smells as they would do without these obstacles: even so souls troubled with passions cannot produce the virtuous actions, which they would do without these agitations.' And men of action quite agreed with the Stoics. To fritter time and energy away on fancies or emotions was simply to proclaim oneself unfit for the serious work of life. When Charmion reproaches Cleopatra

with the feeble hold that love has on her, the sister of Ptolemy makes reply :

> Les princes ont cela de leur haute naissance,
> Leur âme dans leur sang prend des impressions
> Qui dessous leurs vertu range leurs passions ;
> Leur générosité soumet tout à leur gloire.

For souls less generous than hers the only path to 'glory' lay through rigorous self-mastery, complete devotion to some definite end. It mattered little whether the aim was high or low, virtuous or vicious ; the need of discipline is equally preached by austere Du Vair and by such resolute scoundrels as Cardinal de Retz. 'It requires much greater qualities,' wrote this strange priest, 'to become the successful head of a party than to rule the universe. Amongst these resolution ranks with judgment—I mean the heroic judgment, whose province it is to distinguish between what is merely extraordinary and what is impossible.' To these all other qualities must bow. Some place, it is true, was found for love and ambition, on the ground that they strengthened the will ; but pity and the tenderer feelings, which only paralysed and warped it, must be torn out root and branch. He was the best off, who could plume himself —as La Rochefoucauld did plume himself in fact—on finding no trace of them in his heart.

Certain small reservations being made, this view of human nature was countersigned by Descartes. With passion the prophet of universal mechanism could have no dealings, for the same reasons as made him brush aside the evidence of the senses. Passion was desultory and obscure. It dragged the soul no man knew whither ; it came, no man knew whence. Whereas, the weapons of the will were 'firm and determinate judgments concerning the knowledge of good and evil, according to which she has resolved to steer the actions of her life.' Between the passions and the will raged a deadly feud, and on the issue of the fight hung

a man's position in the moral scale. 'Those who can most easily conquer their passions have, without doubt, the strongest souls. And the weakest soul of all is such a one whose will has not at all determined to follow certain judgments, but suffers itself to be swayed by its passions, which, being often contrary one to the other, draw it backwards and forwards from side to side, and put the soul in the most miserable state it can be.' Yet even for these wretches there is hope. 'Those who have the weakest souls can acquire a most absolute empire over their passions, if art and industry be used to manage and govern them. Wherein this art and industry consisted may easily be guessed. Half the secret lay in forming steady virtuous habits, half in adroitly playing off one emotion against another. In Descartes' ideal world thought is on the throne supreme over its own feelings and fancies, and governing a world of matter, whose mechanical constitution only brought it the more surely under the control of mind.

Thus to the worship of will for its own sake succeeds the worship of will controlled by pure intelligence. Such was the natural aspiration of the geometrical spirit. Clearness, rationality and order became the backbone of right conduct. Whatever he said, and whatever he did, a man should be able to give his reasons; since the one sin without forgiveness was acting on the spur of the moment, without any reasons at all. Nothing was more intolerable to members of the Paris Club than shiftless hanging on the skirts of chance. The physical world, as they well knew, did not live from hand to mouth. There nothing was isolated, nothing unimportant; no energy was ever lost. 'The least movement,' cries Blaise Pascal, 'is felt throughout all nature; the whole sea changes for a stone.' And herein the law of gravitation only symbolised the law of life. A man was not free to choose between a purposeful and a purposeless existence. If he did not take the helm in his

hands, and steer his actions to some definite end, the actions themselves would take command, and sail off on some course of their own with small regard to his wishes. Hence, as Blaise Pascal said, it behoved men to walk warily.

But were they capable of walking warily? Descartes saw no obstacle to his dream of a theocracy of reason; but then Descartes lived the life of a learned recluse in a strange land. Pascal, on the other hand, was brought into daily contact with his fellows. He was his father's assistant in an important public office; his sisters were great personages in *précieux* society; he was always in and out of the workshops, superintending the progress of his arithmetical machine. Practical experience soon taught him that human nature, when embodied in actual flesh and blood, is very unlike the grandiose abstraction that figured under that name in the 'Sainte Philosophie.' Official society at Rouen read Du Vair; but it did not love his harmonies. Its sense of duty was but lukewarm; its powers of self-mastery were held in check by a hundred temptations to self-indulgence. Before long Pascal had convicted the bishop of a pious fraud dear to many practical moralists. Because it often does men good to think them better than they are, he had systematically overrated their powers and aspirations, in the hope of spurring on a few to do what he declared possible to all. Pascal thought morality strong enough to stand on its own legs, without the help of pious frauds. Here and there, no doubt, were men capable of heroic impulse; but it was sinning the philosophic sin to turn these exceptions into the rule, and argue to the whole of human nature from 'a few feverish movements, which health cannot imitate.' For even these chosen athletes of virtue could not rest on their high plane. 'They leap up thither for a moment—not, as on to a throne, for ever.'

With Du Vair fell Descartes and Corneille. Later on, when his view of poetry had somewhat softened, Pascal

paid Corneille the indirect compliment of classing his plays among the dangers a true Christian should avoid ; in only too seductive language they presented a view of human nature radically false. Rouen audiences came away from the theatre, fancying that, with ' a little art and industry,' they too might develop into an Emperor Augustus :

> Je suis maître de moi, comme de l'univers,
> Je suis, je veux l'être.

Thereupon came the grim comment from Pascal : ' Man is neither a beast nor an angel, and the worst of it is that he who tries to be an angel ends as a beast.'[1] But, in fact, few Rouen audiences did so try. They might applaud the poet's declamation, and even feel a sneaking kindness for strong-willed scamps like Cardinal de Retz ; but all their own ideas and interests were bound up with the immediate satisfactions of the moment. Jacqueline's *précieux* friends might talk at large about the necessity of steering a definite course in literature ; but neither they, nor the Philistines who made game of them, knew what was meant by steering a definite course in life. Looked at *sub specie aeternitatis*—and Pascal would apply no other standard to a race ' created only for infinity '—their career resolved itself into a congeries of trivial, disconnected events. Each was stitched on to the next with infinite care, and yet the whole was as void of inward symmetry or meaning as the patchwork of a child. Their absorption in a question varied inversely with its real importance. Let the issues only concern to-day, and nothing could exceed their anxious care ; let it concern also yesterday and to-morrow, and they left to-morrow to solve the problem for itself. ' It is pitiful,' Pascal cried, ' to see men take so much thought for the means, and so little for the end. Everyone works hard to make the best of his calling ; but what the calling itself shall be, accident decides. " That 's a fine upholsterer," cry the man's friends. Or

[1] *Pens.* 358.

perhaps they fall to talking of soldiers. "They are all mad," says one; while another declares that there is nothing fine but war: the rest of mankind are scullions. By dint of hearing one trade praised, and another cried down, a lad is led to fix on his own. That is the way our tastes are fashioned, and our choice of callings made.'[1]

Thus the end of the matter was a sickening contradiction between what should be and what was. As to the first, Du Vair was right; science only confirmed his teaching on the infinite perfectibility of mind. As to the second point, he was worse than useless. By all means tell the Rouen householder that he ought to have ideals; but, for pity's sake, go on and show him how to frame them, and give him strength to carry them out. He could do nothing for himself. 'Man is certainly born for thought; therein lies all his dignity and all his merit, and his whole duty is to think aright. But what *does* the world think about in fact? Never of this; but about singing and dancing and duels and scribbling verses and making oneself king—without ever pausing to reflect on what is meant by being a king, or by being a man.'[2]

[1] *Pens.* 97, 98. [2] *Pens.* 146.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST CONVERSION

Pascal had not long to wait for an answer to his riddle. One frosty morning in January 1646, his father went out in a hurry, slipped on the ice, and dislocated his thigh. Orthodox surgery failing to cure him, he put himself into the hands of amateurs. These were two brothers, small landowners near Rouen, and known from their respective estates as MM. De la Bouteillerie and Des Landes. They are interesting as an early example of the lay philanthropist, religious motives having led them to place their unusual skill in bone-setting at the service of their neighbours. Their work lay ordinarily among the poor ; but Stephen Pascal was a personage, and his case a hard one. For three months they devoted themselves entirely to him, taking up their quarters in his house. Here, while curing the father, they had an opportunity of talking religion to his children ; for the two brothers were zealous followers of the Abbé Guillebert, a country clergyman near Rouen, and one of the first recruits to a party about to make much noise in the world. He had come deeply under the influence of a most remarkable man no longer alive, Jean Du Vergier de Hauranne, titular Abbot of Saint Cyran, a Benedictine monastery in central France. And Saint Cyran had interpreted to his countrymen the theories of a Dutch divine, Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres in the Low Countries, and author of a bulky treatise

on the theology of St. Augustine published posthumously in 1640.

The bishop was a theologian, who had spent three-quarters of his life within the walls of Louvain University; but the movement he headed aimed very much less at dogmatic innovation than at a revival of personal religion. To men like La Bouteillerie and Des Landes Jansenism meant no more than this—a much chastened conscience, unusual inwardness of life, and an unusually strict performance of Catholic religious duties. Nevertheless, behind the piety lay a formal doctrine; and it was this doctrine that first interested Blaise Pascal at once by its likeness and unlikeness to the theories of Du Vair. Both prelates believed that the only hope for their fellow-creatures lay in setting before them sternly practical ideals of conduct; and, in order to discover what those ideals should be, both forswore scholastic generalities, and 'founded on man the greatness of man.' Here the resemblance ends. Du Vair, a busy man of action, had studied humanity where and when he would—sometimes in the market-place or law-court, more often in the 'Manual' of Epictetus—dwelling on whatever suited his moralistic prepossessions, and contentedly blind to the rest. Jansen's method was less captious. A divine and nothing else, he drew his views of human nature from the Bible; and the Bible forced upon his notice, along with the proud destinies of man, his misery and his dependence—dependence not only on a higher power, but also on the ignoble forces of the physical nature round him. These Du Vair had overlooked—at best, had handled in the spirit of a Stoical Pangloss. To the strong soul, at any rate, all was for the best in this best of possible worlds. Next Descartes had taken up the tale to prove that, with a little 'art and industry,' the feeblest wretches might become strong souls.

Every syllable of the 'Augustinus' is a disproof of this

thesis. Blaise Pascal has already discovered that average man by no means fulfils the expectations of the 'Sainte Philosophie'; Jansen is now at hand to explain that he could not do so, if he tried. In their present state men are weak and helpless creatures; yet this very weakness is a blessing in disguise, because it peremptorily throws them back on their Creator. So long as they have confidence in their own strength, they will build up systems of morality, wherein religion is but one ingredient. Once crush that confidence, and religion is reinstated in its sovereign rights. Powerless to do anything alone, their soul must recognise that the one and only path to righteousness lies through the grace of God.

Accordingly, the first position of the 'Augustinus' is the helplessness of man. Much is said of the way our soul is linked with a body, of the horrible reality of physical pain, and its influence on the will. Jansen's Church-Latin takes on a grim relish, as he dwells on the more repulsive forms of illness—plague, smallpox, hydrophobia—then, as now, the curse of a country where dogs are used as beasts of burden. Against these what can human science do? 'Surgical instruments,' Jansen cries, 'are themselves instruments of torture. Their cruel aid may avail to save man for other and worse pains in the future; but, at best, they can only stave off for a moment the approach of death, most terrible of terrors.' Let pinchbeck optimists deny that such things were serious evils. Let them hope to stifle the voice of Nature groaning in her travail, when they had stilled the roaring of the sea by shouting louder than its waves.

From the miseries of the body Jansen passes to the miseries of the mind. 'Who does not know with what ignorance, with what store of vain cupidity, man comes into this world? Were he but suffered to live as he pleased, he would fall into a multitude of vices beyond my power to

name. But inasmuch as Divine guidance does not wholly forsake the damned, there arises within the human breast—though not without great pain and labour—a check on its natural inclinations. Why should children be driven with threats and rods, unless war must be waged against their ignorance, and limits set to their cupidity? Why should it be hard to remember and easy to forget—hard to be industrious, and easy to be idle—unless some cruel blight had warped our nature through and through?'

And that our nature is thus blighted is the second thesis of the 'Augustinus.' Scripture and experience alike bear witness that our present is not our rightful state. Behind his present feebleness and misery may be described faint traces of a time when man was all, and more than all, the 'Sainte Philosophie' conceived him. 'Naturally the human soul, being rational and the image of God, is of such immense capacity that it can find neither rest nor satisfaction, save in His infinitude.' But from this high state man has fallen, because he preferred himself to God. 'This evil choice fell, as it were, from a most high place on to the self-glorifying soul with such force that its traces remain deeply imprinted therein. What the will has once embraced in the plenitude of its judgment can never again become displeasing to it. This is the very essence of concupiscence that the will should be caught in itself, and held fast as though by bird-lime; so that it cannot shake off this unnatural passion otherwise than by the help of God.' For once the evil is let in, it eats into the very marrow of man's being. He transmits it to his descendants, just as the Ethiopian passes on his black skin to his children, 'not simply like a garment, but as the very quality of his body.' And one manifestation of concupiscence gathers others round it. It becomes the 'mother and the child of sin,' being at once itself a transgression and the heaven-sent punishment of past offences. Jansen has often on his lips the words of an

ancient Christian poet: 'In vulnera vulnere surgit.' By a wound man rises to fresh wounds.

So desperate is his state that only a heaven-sent remedy can avail to save him. The third thesis of the 'Augustinus' is the redeeming power of grace, *Gratia medicinalis Christi Salvatoris*. And by grace Jansen simply meant the birth of a religious sense. This may be strong, or it may be weak; but even its humblest forms are enough to distinguish him who has it from those who have it not—to draw all his actions into a new perspective, and put a different colouring on all his thoughts. In other words, it involves a radical change of character; and, as such a change is beyond man's power to effect, grace must descend upon him like a whirlwind—as once it descended on Jansen's two spiritual heroes, St. Augustine and St. Paul—and draw his will 'irresistibly, unfailingly, victoriously,' out of darkness into light. Thereby he undergoes what Protestants call conversion. This need not be violent or instantaneous: it was left for the degenerate Jansenists of the eighteenth century to develop 'convulsions' quite as morbid as ever disgraced a revivalist camp-meeting in New England. Yet the seeds of revivalism are already in the 'Augustinus'; and Jansen never put his case so clearly as did President Jonathan Edwards, author of many a Great Awakening in Massachusetts. 'There are many in these days,' he writes of the professed defenders of free-will, 'who say that the manner of the Spirit of God is to co-operate in a silent, secret and undiscernible way with the use of means and of our own endeavours; so that there is no distinguishing by sense between the influences of the Spirit of God and the natural operations of our own minds. But Scripture abundantly teaches that grace in the soul is so the effect of God's power that it is fitly compared to those effects which are farthest from being owing to any strength in the subject, such as a being begotten, or being raised from the dead. So it was with the

cases of particular persons recorded in the New Testament. They were not effected in that silent, secret, gradual and insensible manner, which is now insisted upon; but with those manifest evidences of a supernatural power wonderfully and suddenly causing a great change, which in these days are looked upon as certain signs of delusion and enthusiasm.'

Delusion and enthusiasm were freely enough set down to the count of the Jansenists, but their founder cared little for such charges. To worldlings conversion might seem weird and unaccountable enough; to the theologian nothing was more natural. Grave as they looked, the soul's disorders were functional rather than organic. Break the bonds of self-love, and the soul sprang back to its rightful place in the universe. Then, and then only, was it free. 'When a man lives in the land where he was born,' says Jansen, 'we call it his country; when he obeys his lawful sovereign, we speak of him as free. Whereas, if he is carried thence by force, he endures slavery and exile. Such is also the case of the soul. Its fatherland is truth, which is none other than God. Truth is its country, God is its Father; whereas the dominion of the creature means servitude in a strange land.'

Freedom, however, could only be reached through the portals of conversion; the rest of mankind were slaves. Not that Jansen dealt much in total depravity, as interpreted by Calvinist divines; had he done so, he would never have made a convert of Blaise Pascal, wont to regard his fellow-creatures as neither angels nor beasts. Jonathan Edwards must denounce—though not without a protest from the more practical side of his nature—the common run of men as 'vipers spitting poison at God': Jansen dwelt rather on their hopeless mediocrity—their 'concupiscence, blindness, desertion of God'—three qualities more easily discoverable among the average citizens of Rouen. Then, too, he was readier than Edwards to find signs of

good in the natural man—intuitions of Divinity in Plato, a certain honourable respect for virtue and fear of the reproach of conscience among the mass of unconverted men. This tribute to fact once paid, however, Jansen's logic sweeps him away. The good deeds of the unregenerate have their value, but they are 'not so much seeds of virtue as ruins left over from the integrity of man's first state.' Plato or Fabricius will be punished less than Catiline, but all three will be delivered over to the body of one death. For it matters little whether the sinner be a degenerate Christian lacking love, or a heathen philosopher lacking knowledge of God. The one real good is the good will, and only in its Christian form is the good will worthy of its name. In other words, the only actions pleasing to God are those done from religious motives. Why should I claim to be more in His sight than my drunken neighbour, when only thrift or self-respect or worldly prudence keep me from the public-house? And how can a heathen, who does not know God, act from religious motives at all?

Thus the doctrine of conversion melts into predestination. God made certain races Christian; from these He chose out whom He would, and left the rest to perish in their sins. Surprise has sometimes been expressed that Pascal should have lightly accepted so terrible a doctrine. Even in his own day Deists had arisen to protest against its arbitrary narrowness, and denounce the God of superstition whose 'justice' human ills exalted, whose 'essence' human misery enriched. But then, the Deists were dissolute folk quite outside the circle of decorous lawyers frequented by the Pascals. Judges have never been specially humane in their ideas of moral accountability, as any history of the criminal law, or any leading case in criminal insanity will show. In every country they are quick to punish undoubted breaches of the law, without much stopping to consider whether or not they were the prisoner's fault. Then, too, a professional

instinct led Stephen Pascal and his colleagues to carry to the farthest point a common habit of the age, and conceive of their Maker as a hypostatised absolute sovereign: like the Louis XIV of Saint Simon, He 'commanded, and gave His reasons to none.' Why, indeed, should He not do so? What did absolute sovereignty mean, but doing what one liked with one's own? Of all the Churchmen of the age Fénelon stood nearest to the modern world—was most free from the theological perversity of clinging to obnoxious opinions just because lay humanity disliked them. Yet Fénelon applied the favourite Calvinistic figure of the potter and his wheel with a ruthlessness worthy of Jonathan Edwards. Malebranche, again, was no friend to autocratic whimsicality either in God or man, and explains at length how He is bound by rigid laws of His own. But amongst these justice to His creatures finds no place. Malebranche maintains predestination in its most repulsive, because most arbitrary, form. It is necessary to God's purposes to save a certain number of souls, but which particular souls these are He does not greatly care. Nor may He save too many, 'lest His mystical temple grow unshapely through being spacious in excess.'

Besides, it was hard for a keen young mind to go through life without seeing that some men are naturally religious, while others are not, excellent as they may be in other ways. Nowadays this difference would be set down to variety of temperament; but Pascal's century dug a deep gulf between the natural and the supernatural worlds, and would not refer a theological result to any but theological causes. If some men were more religious than others, it could only be because God had called the first, and hardened the hearts of the second. And that their hearts were really hardened the age found no difficulty in believing. It was vaguely supposed that the Ten Commandments—or, at any rate, the latter five—were imprinted on the conscience

of every man born into the world ; so that a Samoyede or Hottentot knew that murder and adultery were wrong quite as well as any educated Christian. If the Hottentot forgot this, his guilt was all the greater. The famous Huguenot controversialist, Pierre Jurieu, lays down as the united utterance of sound theology and common sense that a man who sins through ignorance of his duty is morally below a man who sins with his eyes open. And the reason he gives is that in the first case will and reason are alike corrupted ; whereas in the second the intellect, at any rate, is clear. Such Catholic enemies of Jansenism as Fénelon only escaped from this conclusion by a quibble. Huguenot children were not damned for sucking in heresy with their mother's milk. Their spiritual blindness was the punishment of their nursery peccadilloes ; and of this richly merited blindness reprobation was the natural result. The Jansenist controversy did not turn on whether God was just or unjust—only on whether His injustice was a little greater or a little less.

Moreover, Jansen's doctrine only bore intolerably hardly on those in whom he felt no practical interest. Protestants and Greek philosophers and babies dying unbaptised might be abandoned without scruple to the tender mercies of a syllogism ; but with living, unregenerate Catholics the case was very different. Here there was no room for despair ; who could say but what God would one day please to convert them ? Jansen's thoughts went back each moment to an Apostle, once ' the chief of sinners.' Then, too, the language of the ' Augustinus ' is often more repellent than its meaning. Jansen was torn asunder between his instincts as a practical reformer and his training as a professional divine, brought up to use a highly cumbrous and inelastic language framed much more in the interests of consistent logic than of spiritual truth. His tongue runs into universals, when his heart means only relativities ; and

confusion is the result. Take, for example, the fundamental position of the 'Augustinus,' that man cannot do, or wish to do, good without the help of grace. This, in itself, is a sufficiently awkward way of saying that only in proportion as his character is righteous can a man do righteous actions; but the difficulty becomes still greater, when the 'Augustinus' goes on to declare that we must co-operate with grace. How, if co-operation is essential, can it be said that grace does all?

And yet Jansen's meaning is perfectly clear. He falls alternately under the spell of two opposing tendencies. On the one hand he must minimise the value of men's efforts, in order to humiliate them, and teach them to trust not at all in themselves, but only in their Maker. On the other hand he must screw out of their conscience the greatest possible activity, since 'God does not build His temple out of lifeless stones, nor suffer His elect to lie supine like sick men, while grace rains on them from Above.' The obvious conclusion to draw is that neither principle is absolute; both are simply relative to certain states of mind. Indispensability of grace bars out presumptuous self-dependence; need of co-operation is a spur to indolence and despondency. And perhaps Jansen's followers would have put this interpretation on his teaching, had they been free to do so. But they were not free. The 'Augustinus' had become the subject of a bitter controversy before it left the printer's hands; and a controversialist cannot pick and choose. The world's charity writes him down a renegade, unless he is prepared to fight for every thread in the surplice, and every comma in the rubric. The Jansenists felt—and felt quite rightly—that they could not tamper with a single line in their master's book without abandoning to the Jesuits his whole doctrine of conversion. And so they stoutly defended the 'Augustinus'; though all they meant thereby was that something more than human effort was necessary to regeneration.

Sooner or later there must come the touch of a Spirit that waits not at our beck and call; though at the same time they told the natural man that the merest wish to reform was a sign that grace was already stirring within him.

Naturally, such a doctrine made a vast appeal to the will. To the will grace came, through the will grace triumphed, by our will we should be judged. Of this most excellent proof is afforded by the two great Jansenist abbesses, Angélique and Agnes Arnauld. In the first place they held before the will the most tremendous motives for exertion. 'Time is short,' wrote Angélique, 'but eternity is very long. Those who have been slaves in time will be freemen of eternity; but those who have been free in time will be slaves eternally.' Secondly, they refused to allow that any action could be morally indifferent; whatever was not good was bad. 'The world,' wrote Agnes, 'calls certain pleasures innocent, and it is true that they are not actually destructive of grace. But the weak and sensual souls that indulge in them soon become stagnant, like water cut off from its source.' Thus all a man's thoughts and all his acts were drawn into a single focus. Port Royal felt itself caught up into the very purposes of God. 'We are embarked,' cried Agnes, 'on the sea of His predestination, which will carry us whither it will. Our whole duty is to pray, to gain His favour by our trustfulness and honesty, and not to rely on our own efforts.' Men need no longer pick and choose between several religious ideals: all objects but one were swept from their path. They were not even tempted to make too much of success. 'God did not ask you to gain victories, only to do your best,' Agnes wrote to a dispirited friend. 'You must not make success your end, but leave that to His Providence; indeed, success would not matter at all, did it not often bring advantage to our neighbour.' Lastly, when inspiration failed for the moment, they could afford to wait without indolent repining. 'Let

us rather go before the Bridegroom, like the Virgins in the parable, doing what we can.'

Such utterances do not make up the most original side of Jansenism, but they might well prove attractive to a young man in the position of Blaise Pascal. He had already learnt from Du Vair that the most important thing in life was conscious direction of the will towards some definite end. But experience had gone on to teach him that there were two fatal objections to the ideals of the 'Sainte Philosophie.' They ignored the seamy side of nature's dealings with mankind; and they expected from man himself efforts wholly beyond his power to make. Jansen made demands on the will as strenuous as those of Du Vair; but, in doing so, he overlooked neither the cruelty of nature nor the helplessness of man. Unlike more commonplace theologians, he was quite prepared to face the worst aspect of the worst, and welcome both cruelty and helplessness as a sharp reminder of the omnipotence of grace. Souls were adrift no longer, knowing neither what they could, nor what they should perform; for grace brought them alike the power to form high resolves, and the power to carry them out. Here, then, Pascal found an answer to the contradiction between man's actual faculties and his ideal end; and hereon his so-called first conversion followed as a logical necessity. It was no emotional transport—no Methodist 'sense of sin'—that drove him, but simply a conviction that the human race is powerless to fulfil its destinies without the help of God. 'I should not have the boldness to direct my cries to Thee, were there any other that could hear and could relieve them,' he writes in one of the 'Prayers in Sickness' composed about this time. God must be loved, because without love there is no grace, and without grace no full development of the moral self. Hence emotion would do well to follow, where logic shows the way. 'O the happiness of those who, with an absolute choice and preference and an

invincible bent of inclination, can love perfectly and freely what they are engaged to love out of duty and necessity.'

Exactly when the change took place there is no evidence to determine. Gilberte was no longer at home to chronicle her brother's movements; in 1641 she had married her cousin, Florin Périer, a judge of Stephen's old court at Clermont. According to a family tradition, Blaise was the first convert. He brought over Jacqueline in the late autumn of 1646; and their united efforts were successful with Stephen. Lastly the Périers followed, during a long visit paid to Rouen in the spring of 1647. Evidently the process was no short one. Blaise was interested and impressed by La Bouteillerie and Des Landes—all the more so since his father's long illness cast a gloom over the household, and his own health had been failing ever since Gilberte's marriage. He began by talking over the new ideas with Jacqueline, as a subject more worthy of discussion than her favourite *précieux* poets. For a while, however, she turned a deaf ear to his arguments. Respectably pious she was already; but she also 'loved the world,' and saw no reason for changing her way of life. But Blaise was not the man to stomach opposition, least of all from his own younger sister. Her objections only intensified his zeal; as she afterwards reminded him, he plied her with more and more urgent exhortations against the folly of allying two things so utterly incompatible as the spirit of religion and the spirit of this world. When she at last took genuine fire, its warmth reacted on his emotional nature; Jacqueline's conversion unmistakably set the coping-stone on his own.

Nor was she the only sufferer from his intemperate zeal. Appetite for theological controversy grows with its practice; and in the first flush of his conversion Blaise rushed headlong into the ugliest chapter of his life. In February, 1647, there drifted to Rouen a derelict ex-Capuchin friar, known as Frère Saint Ange. He belonged to a class of eccentrics

common to every age and country. In the lay world they square the circle, or solve the problem of perpetual motion; if clergymen, they reconcile faith and reason on lines as unacceptable by reason as they are distasteful to faith. Not that Saint Ange's theories were altogether lacking in interest. A humble Raymond of Sabunda, he carried on to the theological field the revolt against scholastic technicality already so much in evidence with Descartes and the Paris Club. His ideal was to make philosophy talk the language of common sense. Men were to rack their brains no longer over ponderous treatises; surer guides were offered them in 'the truths of faith, whereof every Christian may possess himself through the liberality of his Redeemer, and in those first truths of nature and morals, which appear indubitable to all men, so soon as they consult their reason.' Indeed, his enthusiasm for common sense pushed him on to dangerous ground. Only by a hair's breadth did he escape the heresy of maintaining that in a 'powerful and vigorous mind' reason can take the place of faith, and discover the truths of Revelation for itself.

Lodged in the house of his patron, the Attorney-General of Normandy, Saint Ange developed his theories to anyone who would listen. One day he called on two young friends of Pascal, Du Mesnil, son of a Rouen judge, and Adrien Auzout, the future eminent astronomer, now a boy of eighteen. He was launching forth on his favourite subject, when Blaise himself appeared on the scene, and conversation took a different turn. Saint Ange began to explain how it was possible to calculate the total numbers of the human race. All things came from God, and to God all must return. Mind, being incorporeal, could return of itself; but matter must be conveyed by mind. That was why God had coupled souls and bodies together. The end of the world could only come, when every particle of matter in the universe had served to form a human being, whose soul could duly claim

it at the Resurrection. Hence it was only necessary to know the cubic dimensions of the universe, in order to calculate exactly how many inhabitants it must have. The three young men received this theory ' with as much laughter as civility would allow,' and began to make objections. What proof had Saint Ange that there was any connexion between the substance of the sun and that of this planet ? The Capuchin answered that they did not understand the real meaning of substance ; it was the unity, of which the things we see were only ' accidents and appearances.' He was going on to illustrate his meaning by an odd comparison—substance was the sea, and perceptible objects were bottles of water bobbing about on its surface—when he was interrupted by a general burst of laughter. He wound up promptly with a vague compliment to young M. Pascal, whose researches into the vacuum in nature were already attracting great attention in Paris.

Young M. Pascal was not mollified. Quite apart from natural disgust at all this frivolous ingenuity, his new Jansenist instincts rose in revolt against a divine who made belief independent of grace ; and he undertook the part of an amateur Holy Office. A few days later, he and his two friends called on Saint Ange at the Attorney-General's house ; with them they took the Abbé Le Cornier, son of another Rouen judge, and lately come back with high honours from the Sorbonne. Pascal opened the battle with some mathematical calculations to prove that, if Saint Ange was right, the world must last at least four thousand million years. But conversation soon drifted off on to the question of grace, and the unsuspecting Capuchin began to expound a system of his own for reconciling Jesuits and Jansenists. Before he had finished, however, he realised that he was speaking to inquisitors. He broke off discussion and showed his visitors out, stopping them at the hall-door to emphasise that what he had said

must not be treated as dogmas, but simply as casual suggestions.

The three young men paid no heed to his caution, and began to denounce his heresies about the town. Public opinion soon grew excited. The lawyers and the parish priests were for Saint Ange; the monasteries naturally sided against a renegade from his order; the cathedral clergy hated his patron, the Attorney-General, whose healthy Erastianism had tried to interfere with their pluralities and general indecorum. Matters came finally to a head, when Richelieu's brother, the sinecure Abbot of Saint Ouen, presented Saint Ange to a living. There now appeared on the scene a personage almost as strange as Saint Ange himself. This was Jean Pierre Camus, formerly Bishop of Belley, now suffragan to the invalid Archbishop of Rouen. Camus was famous for his jocular, often tactless, but extremely downright sermons, and still more famous with his pen. He was one of the first in any country to indite what would nowadays be called improving literature for the young; a contemptuous Jansenist lady describes his books as a 'mixture of tales and pious discourses. They always ended with a martyrdom or a vocation to the cloister, and yet were as full of human passions as any secular romance.' Such a man was well fitted to understand Saint Ange, and raised no objection to his institution. The three young men, annoyed to find that their denunciations had such small effect, complained to the Archbishop direct. He ordered an official inquiry, which Camus made as easy as possible for Saint Ange.

However, the three young men were resolved not to let their prey escape. On their first genuine religious excitement followed the thrill of delicious self-importance felt when youth for the first time sets the criminal law in motion. Disregarding the advice of their own elder friend, Le Cornier, who begged them to leave the matter alone, they went off

to the Archbishop's country-house, and denounced Saint Ange again. François de Harlai was the best scholar on the Bench—he had been known to preach in Greek—but his judgment was by no means equal to his learning; the wits compared his mind to a library turned topsy-turvy. Besides, he was on exceedingly bad terms with the Government officials in Rouen. He suddenly descried behind Saint Ange the malign hand of the Attorney-General, plotting against the independence of the Church. In a sharp letter he reminded Camus that the theology of lawyers was not always that of the Apostles, and elaborately contrasted the godly zeal of these young laymen with the supineness of the clergy. Camus decided that the matter was now slipping beyond the region of his common sense, and called in Stephen Pascal. A treaty of peace was eventually patched up, Saint Ange being inducted to his living.

A few months later Blaise bore more acceptable witness to his new beliefs. His various scientific labours had undermined his health, and in the summer of 1647 he suffered a complete collapse. Gilberte Périer gives many distressing details—violent and prolonged neuralgia, partial paralysis of the lower limbs, inability to swallow—all pointing to a grave attack of neurasthenia. It was now that Jansenism appeared to him as something more than a clever answer to the ethical riddles thrown out by Du Vair—as much more than an orthodox stick to beat misbelievers like Saint Ange. For the first time he felt himself useless; and, as he well knew, neither science nor Du Vair cared much for the service of loiterers able only to stand and wait. Jansen dealt with illness in another fashion. 'For comfort,' wrote Pascal a little while later, 'we must never look to ourselves, or mankind, or the rest of creation: we must look to God alone. Creatures are never the first cause of the accidents we call ills; God's Providence is their one and only cause, their arbiter and their sovereign. Therefore, if we wish for

relief, we must follow the evil to its source. We must cease from regarding it as a stroke of ill-fortune, as a fatal necessity of our nature arising from the composition of our organs; for God has not abandoned His elect to hazard or caprice. We must conceive of it as a decree of His Providence, willed from all eternity to take place in a certain year, on a certain day, at a certain hour, in a certain place, in a certain manner; we must believe that all that happens is foreknown and foreordained of God. Then we shall venerate His holy judgments; we shall bless the guidance of His Providence; we shall unite our will with His, and will in Him, with Him, for Him, whatever He has willed for us from all eternity.'

Resignation to the Will of God Pascal might have learnt from Du Vair, but the 'Sainte Philosophie' could not teach him the chastening effects of illness. 'I know, O Lord, that at the instant of my death I shall find myself entirely separated from the world, stripped naked of all things, standing alone before Thee to answer to Thy justice concerning all the movements of my heart and spirit. Grant that I may look upon myself as dead already, separated from the world, stripped of all the objects of my passions, placed alone in Thy presence to implore Thy mercy for the conversion of my heart. Grant that I may find exceeding comfort in the thought that Thou art pleased to send this image and appearance of death as the subject of Thy mercy, before Thou sendest a real dissolution to exercise Thy justice. I pray not to be exempted from pain, for that is the glorious recompense of saints; but I pray that I may not be abandoned to the pains of nature without the comforts of Thy Spirit, for that is the curse of Jews and pagans. I pray that I may feel at once the pains of nature for my sins, and the consolation of grace by Thy Spirit; for that is the true state of Christianity.'

Still, it was not enough to consider the moral lessons

of illness. Blaise—impelled by a sick man's sick fancies—passes on to consider his ill-health as an actual merit in the eyes of Heaven. 'O God, Who so lovest bodies exercised by suffering, be pleased to accept my body—not for its own sake, nor for what it contains, for all deserves Thy wrath—but for the evils it endures, which alone deserve Thy love.' In other words, he was in danger of idealising asceticism; and asceticism, when practised for its own sake, is more purely moralistic than Du Vair himself. In fact, the first conversion left Pascal very much nearer the 'Sainte Philosophie' than ever he imagined. Its civic virtues are, indeed, replaced by Catholic monastic ideals. Pascal will pray for 'a divorce from the sweetness of health and the pleasures of the world.' He will lament 'the entire loss of that time which Thou hast given me for no other purpose than worshipping Thee, and becoming penitent for my daily trespasses.' As yet, however, he had not passed beyond the stage of Luther in his cell at Erfurt, before he learned to 'send away Moses and his Law.' He had not penetrated far enough into the inner meaning of religion to see that evil does not lie in the mere things round us; it lies in the use we make of them—that is, in ourselves. And unless a man manages to rise above them, things will remain his masters. By them he will be tempted to measure his own position in the moral scale, the amount of love he bears his Maker being conceived to vary inversely with the amount of interest he takes in that Maker's works. If he cannot continue to regard 'all that is perishable as perishing—nay, as already perished,' sooner or later he will grow disheartened, give up the effort, and drift back again to the world.

Such was the case with Pascal himself. Zeal and intelligence he had in plenty; but that did not save him from reading through the 'Augustinus' without the least eye to its principal lesson. For the great work of Jansenism was to insist that religion does not mean believing a particular

opinion, or adopting a particular mode of life; it means conversion, becoming a new creature. That is precisely where it differs from the Stoicism of Du Vair. Morality is an end outside myself; I can hold it up at arm's length, as it were, examine, and gradually approach it. But in religion this is impossible. There, as a maturer Pascal will lay down, God cannot be the end, unless He is also the beginning. I cannot commence to do religious actions, until I have become religious. In a certain sense, I must have reached the goal, before I start to run the race. I must live as though my higher were my only—as it is already my true—self. That is what the Apostle meant, when he said: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life, which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT EXPERIMENT OF THE PUY-DE-DÔME

Conversion to Jansenism by no means necessarily entailed a breach with science. No doubt, the Port Royal preachers thundered against the pride that went with useless knowledge; and Blaise will presently convince himself that pride and the pursuit of knowledge always went hand in hand. As yet, however, he was satisfied to follow his official leaders; and they were by no means hostile to sound learning. Fromond, Jansen's favourite pupil, and editor of the posthumous 'Augustinus,' was an astronomer of mark; Antoine Arnauld, the rising hope of Port Royal, was no mean geometer. No one believed more fervently than he in the moral value of mathematics. In themselves, he quite agreed that the sciences were nothing worth. Those who had not studied them were better off than those who had; for they escaped alike a very laborious exercise and the risk of thinking themselves wiser than their neighbours. On the other hand, he argued that conscience was ill-equipped for its functions, unless the judgment had been trained. And that training science gave, when studied simply as a mental gymnastic, instead of as an end in itself.[1]

Besides, old habits of thought are not put off in a day; and in the autumn of 1646 the Paris Club suddenly put an overpowering temptation in Pascal's path. The engineer, Pierre Petit, arrived at Rouen with news of a most remarkable

[1] First Preface to the *Logic of Port Royal*, *Works*, xli. p. 105.

experiment made some years before in Italy by Galileo's illustrious pupil, Torricelli. Petit had heard about it from Mersenne, who had tried unsuccessfully to repeat it. There were difficulties about getting the right kind of tubes in Paris, whereas at Rouen was one of the best glass-factories in France. Petit came to see Stephen Pascal in a state of great excitement. The experiment promised to determine whether nature really could endure a vacuum, one of the most burning questions between the old science and the new; and it was well known at the club to which side Stephen's sympathies inclined. Tubes were soon ordered and blown, and the experiment was performed in the presence of Stephen and Blaise, 'a worthy son of his illustrious father,' says Petit in his report.[1] They filled a tube with quicksilver, and plunged it, mouth downwards, into a basin containing the same liquid. To their surprise, instead of emptying itself entirely, a column of quicksilver remained suspended above the mouth of the tube. Petit triumphantly pointed out the vacuum in the upper part of the tube. Blaise, whose scientific enthusiasm always went hand in hand with caution, replied that the Aristotelians would certainly say that air had come in through the pores of the glass, in order to prevent a vacuum. Petit objected that there was still quicksilver in the tube. If air could make its way through the glass, why did it not fill the tube entirely, and let the quicksilver run out? Next they moved the tube up and down, but found that, whatever they did, the column remained at its original level. Clearly, the vacuum could be lessened or increased at pleasure. Then they poured water into the basin, and raised the tube, till its mouth was in the water. The quicksilver then sank out of the tube; water rushed in, and filled it to the top. This effectually replied to Blaise's objection. If there was air in the tube, Petit asked, why did water drive it out?

[1] The report is printed in Brunschvicg and Boutroux, i. pp. 329 ff.

How could it do violence to its own nature, and rise above air?

The Aristotelians, however, were not so easily beaten. Their leader, Dr. Pierius from the Archiepiscopal College, was entirely unimpressed by Petit's elaborate precautions to keep the air out of his tubes. Somehow it must have got in, he said; and once inside, it could rarefy or condense at will, and thus prevent a vacuum. But, if such rarefication really took place, its effects would presumably be more marked in the case of a large vessel than a small. Pascal accordingly set to work with tubes of all shapes and sizes, to show that the height of the quicksilver always remains exactly the same, whatever the size of the vessel. Pierius now changed his ground, and said that the apparently empty space at the top of the tube was filled by volatile spirits given off from the quicksilver. Pascal invited him to meet Dr. Guiffart and other persons interested in science in the court-yard of the glass-factory. Here he got the Aristotelian to admit that wine was more spirituous than water; hence, if the Torricellian experiment was tried with these two liquids, the column suspended in the tube would be higher in the case of water than in that of wine. Pascal promptly took him at his word. Two gigantic tubes, each forty feet long, were brought forward; in one the experiment was performed with water, in the other with wine. Careful measurement revealed Pierius as a false prophet; for the column of water only just exceeded the height of thirty-one feet, whereas the wine stood fully half a foot higher. Finally, so as to clinch the matter, Pascal performed the experiment over again, only making the two tubes change places, and that which had held water now hold wine.[1]

These results altogether cut away the ground from under the feet of the Aristotelians. 'Occlusum est os misellis

[1] See Roberval's account of the matter in his *Premiere Narration sur le Vide* (September, 1647), reprinted in Brunschvicg and Boutroux, ii. pp. 28 ff.

illis sciolis,' said grim Professor Roberval. Pierius, indeed, tried his hand at a reply, but his special pleading was dismissed by Guiffart as a string of 'metaphorical, not categorical discourses; M. Pierius was too good a philosopher to take them quite seriously himself.' For Pascal's experiments had won the honest physician's heart; they delighted all those who were already philosophers, and made philosophers of those who were not yet so. And to their inventor he paid a delicate personal compliment. Whether or not there were a vacuum in nature, he said, there was certainly none in the brains of young M. Pascal. For Guiffart, like most moderate men, was only half convinced. Pascal had certainly proved that Pierius was wrong in maintaining that nature could not endure a vacuum; but it was still possible to strike a judicious balance between old opinions and new, and hold that nature abhorred a vacuum, although without always being able to prevent it. Nor did Pascal feel that, as yet, he had any right to challenge this position. A long series of experiments, performed during the first half of 1647, simply went to show that a vacuum was possible, whether nature liked it or no; that she had no greater repugnance to a large vacuum than a small; and that, in the case of water, her abhorrence never exceeded the height of thirty-two feet.[1]

These triumphs of the Rouen laboratory soon became known in Paris. Saint-Ange had already heard of them in February, 1647; and in the following July an eccentric Capuchin friar, one Father Valerio Magni, Apostolic Missionary in Poland, printed an account of the original experiment, in which he claimed priority over both Torricelli and Pascal. The assertion was preposterous; but seventeenth century etiquette required that a charge of priority, which generally included a charge of plagiarism, should

[1] It will be remembered that the French foot was slightly longer than the English,

be rebutted with a vigour wholly out of keeping with the flimsiness of its foundations. As Pascal was too ill to reply himself, Roberval wrote a detailed rejoinder, which effectually disposed of Magni. This intervention, however, had a curious consequence. The professor was a man of many quarrels, and had had a peculiarly vitriolic dispute with Torricelli a few years before over the question of the cycloid. So, when Blaise printed an account of his performances in the autumn of 1647, he suppressed Torricelli's name, out of regard for Roberval's feelings, and spoke of the original experiment as simply 'coming from Italy.' This was quite enough foundation for a charge of plagiarism. Some four years later, a Jesuit of Montferrand, a suburb of Clermont, seized the opportunity of a public prize-giving to indulge in veiled invectives against persons from Rouen, who claimed the credit of inventions made in Italy, and repeated in Poland. The introduction of Magni's name shows that the Jesuit was simply throwing mud at random; but in any case the accusation was silly enough. Blaise himself said that his assailant might as well have charged him with palming off Galileo's invention of the telescope as his own. Still, to be insulted in one's birthplace is no agreeable sensation; and Blaise wrote off a furious letter to an old friend of his family, Judge Ribeyre of Clermont. Ribeyre sensibly advised him to take no more notice of the matter. 'I think,' he said, 'that the good Father only behaved in the way he did, because he was itching to show off some experiments of his own, which he thought would answer yours. In this he was quite mistaken. After the formal proceedings were over, he brought out a diagram of his inventions, and challenged the company to refute them. As nobody offered to do so, he was obliged to put his pistol back in his pocket, and wait for another chance to discharge it. Still, I am quite sure that he meant no ill, and that it would be better to leave no opening for a contest, in which

he could at any rate say "quod quum victus erit, tecum certasse feretur." '[1]

However, this ridiculous business must not be suffered to obscure Pascal's real debt to Torricelli. As well as the original experiment, he owed to the Italian savant an explanation of its cause, although this letter did not reach him till some months after Pierre Petit's visit to Rouen. At the end of his life Galileo had been perplexed by the question why a pump cannot raise water more than thirty-two feet; but in 1642 he died, leaving Torricelli to find the answer. Pipes thirty-two feet long being inconvenient to handle, Torricelli resolved to see what would happen with a liquid heavier than water, and directed his pupil, Viviani, to take some quicksilver, and perform the experiment repeated at Rouen. Torricelli then took the matter in hand himself, and at once guessed that the reason why some of the liquid remained in the tube was the pressure of the air on the surrounding quicksilver in the basin. Further, he noticed that the column in the tube did not always remain at the same level, and this he set down to variations in the pressure of the atmosphere. He even had hopes of using the quicksilver to measure atmospheric pressure, but these were cut short by his untimely death in the summer of 1647. Some time in the previous spring Pascal heard his explanation of the mystery, and at once seized on it as a deadly weapon for use against the Aristotelians. Hitherto he had only been able to argue that nature cannot endure a vacuum; men like Guiffart could still say that she disliked it, though her feelings were shared by different objects in very different degrees, being much greater in the case of quicksilver than in that of water. But if Torricelli was right, and the quicksilver really changed its level from hour to hour, the ground was wholly cut away from under the Peripatetic feet. The boldest scholastic could hardly maintain that nature's

[1] Pascal, *Works*, iii. pp. 80, 81.

feelings changed as often as those of a capricious young lady.

Still, Torricelli's explanation was no more than a brilliant hypothesis, and Pascal belonged to a school which prided itself on never overstepping the boundaries of proven fact. But where lay one's hand on proven facts? When Pascal left Rouen for Paris in September 1647, he found that everyone was ready to explain why the quicksilver stayed in the tube, and whether its top was really empty. Some clung to Aristotle, and rejected both atmospheric pressure and the vacuum. Some followed Torricelli in admitting both. Others took up the negative line of Roberval, who strenuously denied both atmospheric pressure and horror of the vacuum. Yet a fourth party fell foul of the vacuum, without exactly denying atmospheric pressure. This last was the position of Descartes. In his eyes geometry was the queen of sciences; all others were its tributaries, and must speak its language. Accordingly he refused to distinguish between space, as a mathematical abstraction, and matter, as a physical fact. Whatever was spatially extended could be measured; whatever could be measured actually existed. And, as the vacuum in Pascal's tube was undoubtedly capable of measurement, Descartes denied that it could be really empty. Of what, then, was it full? Descartes answered with his vast hypothesis of *Tourbillons*, or Vortices—a conception that played as large a part in seventeenth century science as has Darwinian Evolution at a later date. It was an attempt to group together, under one magnificent generalisation, all the phenomena of the inorganic world, from the formation of the solar system downwards; and amongst other things it involved the existence of two sorts of matter—one perceptible to human sense, and the other not so. In many respects, however, this second 'subtle' matter was the more important of the two; to its agency Descartes attri-

buted many of the most important facts in physics, such as transmission of light and heat, and gravitation. But, in order to do this, subtle matter must fill all places seemingly void. Hence, alike for physical and for metaphysical reasons, a vacuum was impossible, either in Pascal's tube or elsewhere.

On the other hand, he fully admitted that the air had weight. But he denied that atmospheric pressure was enough of itself to keep the quicksilver up in the tube. Inasmuch as the universe was full, nothing therein could move, unless it changed places with something else. Wherever there was free circulation of air, this might happen easily enough, for things were kept in constant movement. But once try Pascal's experiment in a room from which the outer air had been carefully shut out, and Descartes declared that not one drop of the quicksilver would run out of its tube.[1] And this—he told Mersenne—was not because the liquid had grown lighter, or the resistance of the atmosphere had lessened, but simply because there was nowhere for the quicksilver to go, the room being already full of air. Pascal took the philosopher at his word. Possibly inspired, and certainly helped by Roberval and his old Rouen friend, Adrien Auzout, he hit on the experiment known as a vacuum within a vacuum. He took a tube three feet long, filled it with quicksilver, and stoppered it at both ends with a membrane. To its lower end he attached a basin, also containing quicksilver. This whole apparatus he then fixed inside the upper end of another tube six feet long. This larger tube he also filled with quicksilver, and stoppered at both ends with a membrane. This was plunged into a tub of quicksilver in the usual way, and the stopper removed from the lower end. The quicksilver, following its ordinary course, sank into the lower half of the tube, leaving the smaller

[1] Letter to Mersenne, of 31st January, 1648. *Correspondence*, v. p. 116.

apparatus visible above. The stopper was now removed from the lower end of the smaller tube; but now the unexpected happened. Instead of remaining in its tube, as Descartes thought it ought to do, since the outside air was certainly excluded, *all* the quicksilver sank at once into the basin beneath.

Before this experiment was performed, however, took place Pascal's first and only meeting with the great opponent of the vacuum. In September, 1647, Descartes was on one of his rare visits to France, when Blaise arrived in Paris under Jacqueline's charge, to recruit after his late serious illness. On Wednesday, 25th September, the sister wrote to Gilberte Périer: 'Last Sunday evening M. Habert brought a friend of his from Brittany, M. de Montigny, to see me, as my brother was at church. He came to say that M. Descartes, his compatriot and great friend, was very anxious to see my brother, having always heard so much about my father and him. But, as he knew that he was ill, he had sent to ask beforehand whether there was any objection to his calling at nine o'clock in the morning. I was rather taken aback; for my brother finds it very hard to pull himself together and talk, especially in the morning. Still, I did not like to refuse, and we eventually settled that they should come at half-past ten. On Monday morning arrived M. Descartes, with M. de Montigny and several others. M. de Roberval, to whom my brother had sent word, was also there. After a few polite speeches, they began talking about the instrument. M de Roberval showed it off, and it was much admired. Then they got on to the experiments about the vacuum, and some one asked M. Descartes what was in the tube. He replied with great solemnity that it was his "subtle matter." To that my brother made the best answer he could, and M. de Roberval, thinking that it hurt him to talk, took up the running with just a little warmth, but still quite civilly enough. M.

Descartes replied rather sharply that he did not mind how long he went on talking to my brother, for he spoke good sense; but that there was no good in disputing with a prejudiced man like M. de Roberval. Thereupon he looked at his watch, found it was twelve o'clock, and rose; for he was engaged to dine in the Faubourg Saint Germain, as was M. de Roberval also. So M. Descartes took him in his carriage; and when they were alone together, they went at one another hammer and tongs—rather too much so, said M. de Roberval, when he came back in the afternoon. I forgot to add that M. Descartes said he was sorry to have been here so little, and promised to come again the next morning at eight o'clock. M. D'Alibray promised to be there, and as my brother wished it, he did his best to bring M. Le Pailleur, but he was too lazy to come. One of the reasons of this second visit was to talk over my brother's illness, though really M. Descartes had very little advice to give. He only told him to stay in bed till he was tired of being there, and to take a lot of broth. But as M. Descartes stayed till eleven o'clock, they must have talked over a great many things besides; though I was not there to hear, and could not find out afterwards, as the rest of the day was taken up in giving my brother his first bath. He thought it made his head bad, but that was because the water was too hot. But he was all the better for being bled in the foot on Sunday night; for on Monday he was talking all day long—to M. Descartes in the morning and to M. de Roberval in the afternoon, on questions that touch on theology quite as much as physics. But, except that he slept very badly that night, he was none the worse, and altogether escaped the headache I expected after such a tiring day.' [1]

Some six weeks later Blaise wrote to his brother-in-law, Périer, at Clermont, begging him to put the vacuum question

[1] Letter of 25th September, 1647, L. O. M. p. 309.

to a crucial test. 'I want you,' he said, 'to make the ordinary experiment of the vacuum on the same day, with the same quicksilver, in the same tube, first at the bottom and then at the top of a mountain; so as to see if the quicksilver varies in the two places. If it does—and I have more than one reason to believe it will—we shall have positive proof that it is the weight and pressure of the air that keeps the quicksilver up in the tube, and not horror of the vacuum. For it is very certain that the air weighs more at the bottom than at the top of a mountain; whereas no one could think that nature abhors a vacuum in one place more than in another.'[1] This letter has given rise to a bitter controversy by no means yet extinct. Admirers of Descartes maintain that the philosopher put the idea of this mountain-experiment into Blaise's head. Admirers of Pascal reply that Blaise was quite clever enough to think of it for himself. Though indeed modern research is inclined to withhold the palm of priority from both the rivals, and bestow it on Father Mersenne, despite the fact that his romantic suggestion of trying the experiment on the Peak of Teneriffe was not fated to bear fruit.[2]

How unlikely Pascal was to act on suggestions coming from a Cartesian quarter may be seen from a curious controversy about the vacuum begun a few weeks after the meeting with Descartes. Here his adversary was a certain Father Noel, a Jesuit of sixty-five, and a personage of some importance in his Society. Having been a master at La Flèche at the time that Descartes was at school there, he had since kept up an interest in his old pupils' theories, and amused himself by trying to translate them into scholastic language; for he prided himself on his power of reconciling old and new ideas. Pascal was evidently flattered at

[1] *Récit de la Grande Expérience*, *Works*, iii. p. 140.

[2] See Duhem's article on *Le Père Marin Mersenne* in the *Revue Générale des Sciences* for 30th September, 1906.

receiving his criticisms, and replied to them in his most dignified manner; though into the question of atmospheric pressure he would not be dragged, holding that that must wait till Périer's experiment had been tried. Noel sent a polite rejoinder by the hand of another Jesuit, together with a message begging Pascal not to show his letter to anyone, and not to answer till he felt better. Pascal naturally took this as a flag of truce, equally binding on both parties. In the meantime, however, Noel himself fell ill. Just before he took to his bed, he had finished a pamphlet, on which he had been at work for some months; it was called 'Le Plein Du Vide'—the Vacuum Full—and was prefaced by a dedication to the Prince de Conti. 'To-day Nature is accused of a vacuum, and I stand forward to defend her in presence of your Highness. Heretofore she has often been suspected, but none have dared to pass beyond suspicion, and confront her with actual experiments and facts. I prove her innocent of the charge. I show how worthless is the evidence against her, how fraudulent the witnesses. If all men knew her as your Highness knows her, none would ever have indicted her on trumped-up depositions, or ill-described and worse authenticated experiments. She looks to your Highness to do justice on these calumnies. And if—to clear her altogether—it be necessary to descend to facts, and rebut evidence with evidence, she points to the intelligence of your Highness as a proof that she contains no vacuum.' [1]

This strange production Noel's friends, thinking to give him a pleasant surprise, sent to the printers, while he was still too ill to correct the proofs. On his recovery he compiled a lengthy budget of errata, in which he retreated from many of the positions advanced in the body of the work. This he sent to Pascal, together with the explanation that the offensive passages in his book were intended only

[1] *Le Plein du Vide*, reprinted in Pascal, *Works*, iii. p. 28.

for the Polish Capuchin, Valerian Magni, a notorious enemy of his Society. This was simply a Jesuitical way of saying that he would not have written so insultingly of Pascal, had he made Pascal's acquaintance a few months earlier. But the apology was private; the pamphlet was before the world. Blaise fired off a furious letter to the family friend, Le Pailleur; from his father came a still more incisive rejoinder. Angry as Stephen was, he made effective play with the Jesuit's foolish and fantastic language. 'God grant, Reverend Sir, that you never become clear-headed enough to ask yourself what all this fine language means.' But he was especially nettled by Noel's incursions into the terminology of his own profession. 'You patter away about indictments like a clerk of arraigns, to show that you know a little of everything.' And his letter ends with a threat strikingly fulfilled some eight years later. 'You have stooped to cheap invectives against a young man without any provocation whatsoever. It may well be that he will one day revenge himself in a way likely to cause you an eternal repentance.' [1]

Nor is the 'Letter to Le Pailleur' altogether unworthy of the assailant of Escobar. Pascal was not at war with Noel the man, so much as with Noel the eclectic mixture of scholastic and Cartesian errors. Not that his attacks were always happy; his command of metaphysical terms, for instance, was scarcely greater than Noel's own. The Jesuit had begun by maintaining that the space in the tube could not be empty, because its cubic contents could be ascertained; and, on the Cartesian principle, all that could be measured existed. Pascal was driven back on the lame answer that an empty space stood half-way between nothingness and matter, being distinguished from nothingness by its dimensions, and from matter by its immobility. Noel retorted that such a space was really

[1] *Lettre de M. Pascal le Père au Père Noël*, Pascal, *Works*, iii. pp. 64, 66.

a body. Pascal answered that he might call it a body as much as he pleased, provided he went on to explain that he used the word in a non-natural, unscientific sense, that did not imply objective existence. Noel said he had just as much right to call the space full as Blaise had to call it empty. Blaise denied having ever insisted that it must be empty; all he said was that he should continue to call it so, till some one had proved it full of something perceptible to human sense. Noel, on his side, denied that he had ever asserted dogmatically the existence of the imperceptible substance: he had only presupposed it. Blaise answered that presupposing was a dangerous game. 'These imperceptible substances are as difficult to believe in as they are easy to invent. Writers have before now filled the whole universe with matter of this kind. That is the great advantage of the imagination, that it calls great things into being with as little time and trouble as small, and disposes of the elements as though they were its handiwork.'[1] This was a direct assault on 'subtle matter,' without which Descartes had declared it impossible to explain the mechanism of the universe; and his faithful disciple goes on to explain that, unless it was taken for granted, there would be no accounting for the transmission of light. Whereupon Blaise asked him: 'Inasmuch as the nature of light is unknown to you and me, and perhaps never will be known, how can we possibly be sure that it is incompatible with a vacuum?'[2] Nor were matters much mended when Noel tried his hand at a definition, and declared that light was 'a luminous movement of lucid bodies'—accompanying this with the explanation that luminous meant what was visible to the eye, and lucid what was not so visible. Blaise regretted that this definition left him none the wiser, unless Noel would go on to explain what he

[1] *Réponse de Pascal au Père Noël, Works*, iii. p. 15.
[2] Ibid. p. 13.

meant by luminous, and what might be the inner significance of lucidity.

Even less fortunate were the Jesuit's attempts to account for 'subtle matter' itself. Here he is alternately a Cartesian, a scholastic, and an eclectic mixture of the two—each by turns, and nothing long. As Blaise said, he was very much quicker to change his positions than any critic could possibly be to attack them. 'In a very short time, Reverend Sir,' said Stephen, 'you have called to your assistance the fiery sphere of Aristotle, the subtle matter of M. Descartes, igneous matter, ether, solar spirits, and moving lightness. These are a great number of allies, who have come a long way to help you; and yet, if you were put on your oath, I doubt whether you could swear to knowing a single one. . . . You have begun very artistically—I say artistically because I suppose you meant to show your independence of Aristotle, M. Descartes and everybody else—by mixing up the fiery sphere with subtle and with igneous matter. Next, you went to work still more industriously, and mixed into the mixture a composite of your own, made up of solar spirits and ether. Lastly, you threw into the compound a mysterious something called "moving lightness"—I believe it is of your own invention—and on it you bestow the power of raising the heaviest bodies by its own force. Thus you have only managed to escape the consequences of my son's puerile experiments by entangling yourself in a series of miracles with substances whose very nature was unknown to you.'[1] Blaise himself, in a printed letter to the family friend, Le Pailleur, drew a more impassioned contrast between the friends and enemies of the vacuum. The first lived at peace and unity among themselves; the second waged as bitter a war on one another as on the common foe. Some held to ether, some to spirits of mercury, some to air; others, like Noel, flitted to and fro between one mythical

[1] *Works*, iii. p. 71.

substance and another, in the vain hope of seeing Nature change her laws as often as they changed their minds, and accommodate her effects to their fickle resolutions.

However, the day of triumph was approaching. In November, 1647, Florin Périer had received his brother-in-law's commission, and fixed on the Puy-de-Dôme, a high mountain at the back of Clermont, as the place for the decisive experiment. Snow and fog, however, made this impossible during the winter, and in the spring he was called away on Government service to another part of France. It was not till September, 1648, that he could write to Blaise: 'Last Saturday morning, the 19th of this month, the weather was changeable enough; but as it seemed to settle about five o'clock in the morning, and the summit of the Puy-de-Dôme could be seen, I resolved to proceed with the experiment. I immediately sent word to several gentlemen of note in this city—Father Bannier, a Friar Minim, and several times "corrector," or superior of his society, and M. Mosnier, a canon of the cathedral. Also to MM. de la Ville and Begon, judges of the Court of Exchequer, and Dr. La Porte, a physician in practice here. All of these are men of standing in their several professions, as well as fully equipped in all branches of polite learning. At eight o'clock we were all assembled in the garden of the Fathers Minim, which is almost the lowest spot in the city. I had with me two tubes of about four feet in length, and at once proceeded to make the ordinary experiment of the vacuum nine separate times, in each with quicksilver I had rectified during the three days beforehand. In every case the column of quicksilver reached the height of 26 inches, $3\frac{1}{2}$ lines. I then marked the level on the glass of one of the tubes and left it in charge of Father Chastier (one of the monks of the house, a man as pious as he is capable, and very skilful in these matters) begging him to keep it under observation, and note any changes that might take place. We then set

out for the summit of the Puy-de-Dôme—which is some three thousand feet above the level of the garden—taking with us the second tube, and some of the quicksilver already used. On arriving there I again performed the experiment, and found that the quicksilver only reached the height of 23 inches, 2 lines—being no less than 3 inches, 1½ lines lower than the column in the garden. This so surprised and delighted us that we repeated the experiment five times, always with the same result, in the little chapel under cover, in the wind, in rain and in fine weather. On our return we again repeated it at a place called Lafon de l'Arbre, more than half-way down the mountain. This time the column reached the height of precisely 25 inches. M. Mosnier had the curiosity to try the experiment a second time, with the same result; and our satisfaction was not a little increased at seeing the height of the column diminish in exact proportion to the altitude of the spot. Finally we returned to the garden, where we found the other tube still at its original height, and Father Chastier reported that it had not varied throughout the day, although the weather had been very changeable. I then performed the experiment again with both tubes, using the same quicksilver and basin as I had had on the mountain, and found that both gave a like result—26 inches, 3½ lines. This afforded us a final proof of the certainty of our experiment.' [1]

By this time Blaise had got worked up to a state of almost religious fervour. His letter to Périer pictures the excitement 'not only among our curious friends in Paris,' but also among the foreign correspondents of Mersenne 'in Italy, Poland, Sweden, Holland.' Now he was able to write: 'Inasmuch as my experiment, by a singular stroke of fortune, was famous before ever it was made, I feel confident that it will not become less illustrious now that it is performed, and that the satisfaction it gives will more than

[1] *Récit de la Grande Expérience, Works*, iii. pp. 141–143.

equal the impatience caused by its delay.' At once he issued an account under the imposing title: The Great Experiment of the Puy-de-Dôme; and therewith threw a final challenge into the scholastic camp. 'Let the disciples of Aristotle collect together all the strongest passages of their master and his commentators, and justify horror of the vacuum, if they can. If not, let them acknowledge that in Physics experiment is our true master; and that these researches on the mountain-top have killed a universal superstition—and established an imperishable truth—namely, that Nature has no horror of a vacuum, that she does nothing to avoid it, and that all the efforts hitherto set down to this imaginary cause may be fully accounted for by the pressure of the air.' [1]

The Great Experiment was its author's most dramatic contribution to physics. If the original impulse came from Torricelli, the honour of turning his conjecture into a certainty, and of converting the world thereto, belongs to Pascal alone. Nor did its publication exhaust his interest in the matter. New problems forced themselves upon him. If the quicksilver varied inversely to the altitude of the place of observation, could it not be used for measuring the height of mountains? Investigation, however, proved that the question was not as simple as it seemed; and Pascal began a series of researches—brought to a victorious close some thirty years later by our countryman, Edmund Halley—into the true proportion between atmospheric density and height above the sea. Still more urgent was another problem, already noticed by Torricelli. Not content with altering its level at different altitudes, the height of the quicksilver often varied from hour to hour in the same place. Much poring over weather-charts brought Pascal to the conclusion that the variations depended on changes of temperature and in the force of the wind. Here again

[1] *Works*, iii. p. 128.

Pascal's researches were continued by an Englishman. As an appendix to his two little posthumous treatises—dealing respectively with the equilibrium of liquids and the weight of the atmosphere—his brother-in-law printed a long account of certain 'nouvelles expériences faites en Angleterre par un gentilhomme anglois, nommé M. Boyle.' This gentleman, it need scarcely be said, was the illustrious Robert, father of chemistry and uncle of the Earl of Cork.

The two little treatises aforesaid, composed at some date unknown, between 1650 and 1654, show their author in a new light. The Pascal of the Puy-de-Dôme had been a pure experimentalist; the Pascal of the Treatises, although still wedded as firmly as ever to his test-tubes, foreshadows the Pascal of later days, everywhere resolute to bring out the underlying unity of things. 'Nature imitates herself,' he will write in the 'Pensées.' 'A seed lodges in good soil, and sprouts. An idea lodges in a good brain, and also sprouts. Numbers imitate space, although their natures are so different. All is made and ordered by one Master—roots, branches, fruits, premises and conclusions.'[1] In other words, nature works everywhere by analogy. What is true of the realm of matter is also true of the realm of mind. A tree, as Hegel said, grows like a syllogism; and the ideal concepts of the mathematician spontaneously obey the same laws as the movements of material space. The germs of this conception have already struck root in the Treatises. There Pascal starts from the position that air and quicksilver, gases and liquids, are not separate 'Elements' after the scholastic pattern. They are simply different modes of a single substance, and their fundamental properties correspond in every way with those of solid bodies. It is not due to an irresponsible caprice of nature that atmospheric pressure keeps the quicksilver up in a tube. Hard as the saying may seem to common sense, air is just

[1] *Pens.* 119.

as much a ponderable mass as water, water as stone or iron. Here, however, Pascal was affronting an authority more venerable than common sense. Aristotelianism had grown old in the belief that the elements exercised no pressure in themselves; water did not weigh in water, nor did air in air. This was proved by elaborate deduction from the commonplace fact that a full bucket is much easier to move when floating on the water, than when it is on dry land. 'As though,' cried Pascal, 'water could gain weight by being drawn, and lose it again when poured back into the well. Strange indeed are the devices whereby men try to hide their ignorance. As they cannot tell how the water makes its pressure felt, they sacrifice truth to vanity, and deny the existence of the pressure.' [1]

So Pascal determined to make this sacrifice of truth to vanity impossible for the future, by showing exactly how the water made its pressure felt. At the outset he was largely guided by the Flemish mathematician, Simon Stevin of Bruges, father of hydrostatics. Stevin made clear to him that the amount of pressure exercised by a liquid may be out of all proportion to its intrinsic weight. In particular, he showed that, if two tubes of water be taken of equal height, but very different diameters, the amount of force required to dislodge a stopper from their base will be precisely equal in both cases. But was this pressure peculiar to the base of the tube? Profiting largely by the researches of the Italian savant, Gianbattista Benedetti, Pascal tried a new experiment. He took a closed vessel, having two openings at the top, one large and the other small. Into the small opening he fitted a tube, and filled it with water. Into the large opening he put a tube furnished with a piston, or sliding plug. He found that, in order to counterbalance the weight of the water in the small tube, it was necessary to load the plug with weights enormously heavier than the

[1] *Works*, iii. p. 126.

weight of the water. So soon as these weights were lessened, the water in the small tube began to sink, and the piston was forced upwards. Evidently, therefore, ' a few drops of water can hold heavy weights in equilibrium.' And the same thing happens, if the small tube was fitted with a piston. The more it was pressed down, the heavier must be the weights on the piston in the large tube. ' Hence it follows that if one piston be a hundred times as large as the other, the force of one man acting at the first will balance that of a hundred men acting at the other. Thus a vessel full of water is a new mechanical principle, capable of multiplying forces to any degree we choose.' [1]

Thus did Pascal arrive at the principle of the hydraulic press. He also arrived at an astounding paradox. How was it possible that one man, working at the smaller piston, should balance the force of a hundred men working at the larger ? An experiment of Galileo's put Pascal on the way to an answer. The philosopher took the case of two tubes of very different heights and diameters, communicating by a channel at their base. How was it possible to keep water at the same level in both ? Why did not the large body of liquid in the wider tube sink, and force the water in the smaller tube upwards ? Galileo answered that it was because the amount of momentum required to send a small quantity of water quickly up a narrow tube was equal to the amount involved in the much slower descent of a larger body of water. He himself compared the principle to that of the Roman scales. There a weight of 2lb counterbalanced a weight of 200, because the smaller weight had to travel a hundred times as far as the larger in the same space of time. These views of Galileo were much discussed between Descartes and Mersenne. Descartes maintained that Galileo was wrong in laying his whole stress on the time spent in moving from one point to

[1] *Works*, p. 85.

another; the vital question was not the time, but the amount of distance covered. This led him to the general principle, applicable to all machines, that exactly the same degree of force is necessary to raise 200lb one foot or to raise 1lb two hundred. Pascal, seizing on this principle, at once applied it to his hydraulic press. 'One must rejoice to find,' he says, 'that this new machine obeys the same rule as is always found in old ones, such as the lever or the endless screw; and that the distance should be increased in the same proportion as the force. For it is clear that, if one of the openings be a hundred times as large as the other, the man at the small piston will, by pushing it forward an inch, only drive back the other a hundredth part of an inch; and thus distance is to distance as is force to force.'[1] That being so, Pascal could pride himself on having discovered one more instance of 'Nature imitating herself'; the workings of his new machine conformed entirely to the general principles of statics. Now, however, stepped forward Torricelli to strengthen his thesis with a 'proof perhaps only intelligible to geometers, that may be passed over by the rest of the world.' Its gist was that, if two bodies were connected together by a lever, pulley or other mechanism, they would remain in equilibrium, unless their common centre of gravity descended. Pascal had small trouble in showing that his two pistons were so connected. 'Let us, therefore, rest assured that, if proportionate forces be applied to the openings in a vessel of water, they will balance each other; and that this is the true reason and the foundation of the equilibrium of liquids.'[2]

Thus Pascal's little treatises were far from being *prolem sine matre creatam;* every step forwards had been foreshadowed by some earlier inquirer. But none of these had ever thought of treating the Great Experiment as a mere 'particular case of the equilibrium of liquids,' or of conceiving

[1] *Works*, iii. pp. 85, 86. [2] Page 87.

that equilibrium itself as a twin phenomenon with the lever or the endless screw. Here lay the great originality of Pascal. 'The truths that make up hydrostatics have already been discovered,' writes Duhem.[1] 'But the scattered materials lie pell-mell in a disorderly heap, waiting for the man who will combine them into a harmonious and coherent whole. That man was Pascal. He did not wish to bring forward novelties so much as to arrange and organise what others had said before him. Nor did he think this task unworthy of his genius, for no mean endowments were required to bring it to an issue. Nor is his example altogether uninstructive in our own time. The physicists of to-day do not stint their admiration for a new fact or a hitherto undetected law; but they have few words of praise for those who strive to classify the facts discovered by others, or to seize the underlying principle in the laws formulated by inventors. Are they not afraid of falling under Pascal's condemnation? "All these people have seen the effects, but they do not see the causes. They stand to those who have discovered the causes much as men who only have eyes stand to those who also have a brain; for the effects are visible to the senses, but the causes are only visible to the mind. And, although these particular effects are in a certain sense seen by the mind, the mind that sees them stands to the mind that also sees the causes, much as our bodily senses stand to pure reason."'[2]

[1] *Le Principe de Pascal*, in *Revue Générale des Sciences* for July 15, 1905. My last four paragraphs are a mere summary of this remarkable article.

[2] Pascal, *Pens.* 234.

CHAPTER VIII

A BACKSLIDER

'Scientific abstractions long held me captive,' wrote Pascal in his 'Pensées,' 'but I lost all taste for them, when I found how much they cut me off from my neighbours.' The Pascal of the Great Experiment was far from making this discovery; Archimedes at the sack of Syracuse did not show a greater detachment from the storm and stress around him. Yet the air was thick enough with clouds, when he and Jacqueline came to Paris in September, 1647. Just a twelvemonth after their arrival were put up the first barricades of the Fronde, the last organised protest of French independence against the new system set on foot by Richelieu, and now controlled by Mazarin. Not that the protest was either dignified or effective. The Fronde was so called from its likeness to the slinging-matches then popular among the street-boys of Paris. And the nickname well expresses the childish petulance of the whole movement. It was not so much a blow for liberty as a spasmodic coalition of heterogeneous interests, whose one bond of union was that all alike saw their existence threatened by the rising tide of autocracy. Princes and great lords were in it, because they wanted to preserve their feudal independence. Judges were in it, because they wanted a stricter observance of their constitutional forms. Burgesses were in it, because they wanted an abatement of their taxes. Mobs were in it,

because they wanted disorder for its own sake. Yet this mighty coalition proved an ignominious failure. The Frondeurs rose against the Government; they turned the boy-King out of Paris, and his Cardinal Minister out of France; they plunged the whole country into civil war. But when power came to them, they did not know what to make of it. Each group in their alliance was at daggers drawn with all the rest, and each individual with his group. So soon as fortune began to waver, everyone rushed off to make the best terms for himself he could with the Court at the expense of everyone else. Gaily the Frondeur took the field with his mouth full of fine phrases about liberty, justice and the constitution. He rode home shamefacedly, all the fine phrases gone, profoundly thankful to have saved his precious skin. With such an example before his eyes, well might Pascal declare that the trend towards self was the beginning of all evil in war, in civil government, in households, even in the body of man.

These reflections, however, belong to a later date. In 1648 Pascal's mind was divided between atmospheric pressure and the 'Augustinus'; he had little time to waste on politics. What did it matter to him whether Cardinal Mazarin kept the State-patronage, or was forced to hand it over to the Duke of Orleans or the Prince of Condé? He was far more keen on finding a final answer to Father Noel. Besides, the son of an Intendant could have little sympathy with the Fronde; for the suppression of Intendants was one of its principal demands. They were Richelieu's tax-gatherers, the most outward and visible sign of his system; and on them fell the thunders of the outraged *Parlement de Paris*, so soon as that venerable body plucked up courage to speak out.

> Dès la première ouverture
> Il revoqua les Intendants,
> Dans la campagne brigandants,

Maudits tyranneaux, demy-princes,
Malheurs attachés aux provinces,
Facteurs du défunct Richelieu,
Fléaux quatrièmes de Dieu,

sings a political rhymester of the time. Stephen Pascal only escaped dismissal by resigning his post in May, 1648. He was made a Privy Councillor, and presently joined his son and daughter in Paris.

He found them both embarked on the full tide of Jansenism. Very soon after their arrival they paid their first visit to the great citadel of the party, Port Royal de Paris; for the original convent in the country, Port Royal des Champs, had been temporarily abandoned as unhealthy. Here they were received by Rebours, one of the chaplains. 'He welcomed me in the friendliest way,' Blaise wrote to Gilberte Périer, 'though of course all the civility was on my father's account. I asked leave to come again from time to time, and this he granted; so I shall treat this first visit simply as a breaking of the ice. Soon afterwards I went back there, and told him that we had seen their books and those of their opponents, which was as good as saying that we were on their side. This seemed to please him; and I went on to say that I thought several of their positions could be defended on common-sense principles of reasoning, although, of course, we ought to believe them without the help of reason. These were my very words; and I don't think there was anything in them to offend the strictest. However, as you know, all our actions may have two sources; and I might have been led to speak as I did by vanity and confidence in reason. This he evidently suspected—all the more so since he knew that I had made a special study of geometry. His answer was so full of humility that it would certainly have disarmed the pride he wished to rebuke. However, as I was not in the state he supposed, I tried to make my motives clear. But the more I tried, the more he persisted,

because he mistook my explanations for hardness of heart. So that we started on a false footing, which I have never been able to set right.'

This letter shows a generous independence of bearing towards the clergymen of his own party, a quality never wanting in Blaise. But perhaps it also shows that Rebours' instincts led him right, and that the brilliant young geometer before him had never undergone a real conversion. No doubt, Blaise was willing enough to subscribe all the formulas of the 'Augustinus,' and cast in his lot with the party—that is, he had made up his mind to think about religion in a Jansenist manner, in so far as he thought about it at all. But he certainly was not prepared to give up everything for his Maker. No true convert could have written, as he wrote in one of his 'Prayers in Sickness': 'O my God, how happy is the soul that can love so ravishing an object as Thyself; where the attraction does it no dishonour, the alliance is so full of benefit.' Love of God, as understood at Port Royal, did not busy itself with these questions of 'honour.' Then, too, the Great Experiment stood in the way of conversion. It is true that Port Royal was the home of more than one man of science; Saint Cyran, first and greatest of its directors, had allowed not only metaphysics, but 'cosmography, cosmology, mathematics and meteors' as well, to such students as could draw from them fresh knowledge of the ways of God. But was Pascal seriously willing always to bear this condition in mind? Could he go on weighing the air simply as a means of holiness? Did he care nothing for the celebrity of his Great Experiment? If he did care, Port Royal found him guilty of pride. For pride, as any Jansenist director was willing to explain, did not lie so much in the silly vanity of claiming qualities one had not got as in the far more dangerous vice of pluming oneself on one's real achievements. Whoever did so was a thief, in that he robbed God of a glory appertaining to

Him alone. It was here, and not in commonplace austerities of prayer and fasting, that Blaise felt the pinch of Jansenist asceticism.

Nor was this the only line of cleavage between Pascal and his Jansenist friends. As the interview with Rebours shows, he still believed in 'reason'—that is, in the geometrical spirit, which stood for reason in its most militant, though not altogether most impressive or sympathetic, dress. And the geometrical spirit must needs stamp its own characteristics on the religion of its adherents. They were all for clearness and order. Every belief and every obligation must be set out in definite black and white; their Christianity—as the Cambridge tutor said of Paley's 'Evidences'—must be put into a form capable of being written out at examinations. But Jansen and Archdeacon Paley stood at opposite poles of thought. At Rouen, where he only knew the Jansenism of books, Pascal might mistake the 'Augustinus' for a work informed by the geometrical spirit; but the Jansenism of actual practice soon showed him his mistake. He found that Port Royal was not fighting for a dogmatic system; it was entering an energetic protest against the erection of such systems. Its great work was to insist that religion is an obscure, incalculable force, about whose movements men know little; hence all attempts to fit it into a logical strait-jacket are necessarily failures. 'Indignum et vix tolerandum est,' cried Saint Cyran, 'doctrinam fidei ad puerilia principia logicae, vel omnino ad humanae mentis captiunculas revocari. Hoc puerile et logicum, non virile, non theologicum est.' On many a page of vigorous invective he held up to scorn the Jesuit *ludi-magistri*—chief upholders of the geometrical spirit in its Catholic dress—who spent their best years teaching elementary logic to little boys; late in life, they took to theology, and at once proceeded to expound the inmost secrets of the universe in the light of *barbara* and *baralipton*.

But *barbara* and *baralipton* proved blind guides in matters of religion. Pascal will speak for his whole school, when he presently classes the 'logicians' with heretics, thieves and Mahometan soldiers, as criminals who have broken through every law of God and man, the more exactly to obey some mad code of their own devising.

In short, the Jansenist God was a *Deus absconditus*, who revealed His will in sudden, unexpected flashes. Agnes Arnauld was always bidding her nuns observe how unreasonable his reason was; and Pascal only gave mathematical colouring to the same idea, when he said that there was more proportion between a unit and infinity than between man's justice and the justice of God. Religion was essentially a mystery; a thing given, to be received by man in humble silence. His purblind faculties could make nothing of it; and therefore any attempt on his part to outrun the Teacher, and begin interpreting on his own account, must end in sure disaster. Nor had Port Royal far to look for instances of such disaster. The *ludi-magistri* were the first and most obvious danger; but, before many years were out, Pascal will discover that there were 'logicians' abroad more formidable than any Jesuit. Press him, and even a theologian would admit that there were mysteries in religion beyond his power to solve; whereas the adepts of Cartesianism admitted no mysteries at all. Their 'geometrical God' must keep no secrets from the eye of human reason; He must be transparent through and through. And on the heels of Descartes would soon come Spinoza—still more rigorously scientific—to prove by theorem and lemma that God's nature could not possibly be otherwise than what his diagrams made it. Nor would Spinoza be the last term in the series. Nobody knew better than Pascal that all these philosophers were obeying a perfectly natural human impulse. Jansen had shown how quick our mind is to drag all things down to its level; and at the Paris

Club Pascal had opportunities enough of seeing that its readiness to lay down the law commonly varies in inverse proportion to its knowledge of the facts. Witness the great Cartesian dogma of universal mechanism. But that dogma had not withstood the onslaughts of the experimental school. Pascal himself had a large share in proving that all we really know of nature is what nature deigns to tell us, when interrogated through a test-tube. Why not, then, apply the same method to religion? Why not say frankly that all we know of God is what He pleases to reveal? 'We know the existence and nature of the finite, because we also are finite and extended. We know the existence of the infinite, because it is extended, like us; we do not know its nature, because, unlike us, it has no bounds. But about the existence and nature of God we can tell nothing whatever, because He has neither bounds nor extension. He is infinitely incomprehensible; we cannot say what He is, or even *that* He is. But by faith we know His existence; in glory we shall know His nature.'

The natural corollary of this position was Jansen's doctrine of conversion. And conversion implied a miraculous Power suddenly shooting down into men's lives; as the phrase went, they were 'touched by God' at some definite moment and in an unmistakable manner. Thenceforward they were beings apart. It was not simply that they aimed at higher standards than their neighbours; they brought a quite other logic into play, and appealed to different sanctions of right conduct. 'The just live by faith, sensible men of the world by reason, while fools live by their fancy' was a favourite saying at Port Royal. And the life of faith meant life in accordance with a new supernatural instinct only awakened at conversion, and altogether beyond the purview of unregenerate man. This was the famous Inner Light of Puritan theology. 'Here is,' says Jonathan Edwards, 'a new spiritual faculty, which in its

whole nature differs from all former kinds of sensations of the mind, as tasting is diverse from any of the other senses. It consists primarily in a cordial sense, or sense of heart, of God's spiritual beauty. I say "sense of heart," for it is not speculation merely that is concerned ; nor can there be any clear distinction between the two faculties of understanding and will, as acting distinctly and separately in the matter. This holy taste or relish distinguishes between good and evil without being at the trouble of a train of reasoning ; just as the nature and tendency of a heavy body, let fall from a height, shows the way to the centre of the earth more exactly in a moment than the ablest mathematician could determine by his most accurate observations in a whole day.'

At first sight this 'spiritual sense' seems a peaceful quality enough, and a lineal forerunner of the moral faculty of Shaftesbury and Francis Hutcheson. But in its primitive theological forms spiritual sense was anything but peaceful ; when coupled with a strong doctrine of conversion, it easily encouraged belief in miracles and portents, in 'thunderclaps and visible upsets of grace.' No doubt, the outward badge of Port Royal was a grave sobriety, like that traditionally associated with our English Quakers ; but scratch a little deeper, and there will be found 'enthusiasm' in plenty among the penitents of Saint Cyran. Not a few of them put some very lurid glosses on his maxim that, in a true conversion, God must speak *once* to the soul as directly as on the road to Damascus He spoke to St. Paul, model of all penitents. And Jesuit gossips vied with each other in collecting good stories of Saint Cyran's own inspirational eccentricities. In Father Rapin's 'Memoirs' may be read at length how Cardinal de Bérulle said that he was eaten up with desire to think differently from everyone else ; how Cardinal Richelieu said that, being a Basque, his entrails were all on fire, and he naturally mistook his vapours for

celestial truths. More dispassionate observers came to the same conclusion. Chapelain, the great literary critic, came to admire, but went away bewildered by this strange Abbé, who never argued a subject out, but leapt from one point to another in broken, incoherent phrases. But the faithful disciple and biographer, Claude Lancelot, lets the world into his master's secret. 'Often have I known his discourse sweep upwards like an eagle, and then suddenly stop short. For fear lest that might alarm us, he would say: "It is not because I have nothing to tell you, but because so many ideas are crowding into my mind that I am looking to God to see whether or not I ought to continue."'

What seemed so admirable to Lancelot must needs appear in a very different light to a young enthusiast for the geometrical spirit, even were his intellectual conscience less tender than that of Blaise Pascal—about to fret himself over the question whether mathematics were quite as certain as they professed to be, having regard to their admitted incapacity to prove their own first principles. If Euclid's axioms were not safe, truly the intuitions of Saint Cyran were in evil case. Pascal had been attracted to the 'Augustinus' and its sober logic; but now that sobriety dissolved away into an audacious supernaturalism, and every rational check on action was swept aside in favour of a miraculous grace, unverified and unverifiable. Besides, he was no longer at Rouen, among scientific men no more formidable than Guiffart or Pierius; he was back in Paris among the old friends of the Club. There old habits of thought returned in full force, and made the mysticism of Saint Cyran seem all the more fantastic and unreal. No wonder, then, that he drew back; although at first the change was slow. For some months after their arrival in Paris perfect harmony reigned between him and Jacqueline. In the winter of 1647 she confided to him her wish to become a nun at Port Royal. Blaise entered warmly into the

project, and escorted her to the convent, where they were kindly received by Angélique Arnauld, and passed on to Singlin, the chief confessor of the convent. After one interview he told Blaise that he had never seen in anyone clearer signs of a vocation. But Stephen's children knew that their father would be of a different opinion, and neither dared to write to Rouen. However, in May, 1648, Stephen came to Paris, and Singlin insisted on his being told at once. Blaise undertook the ungrateful task; whereupon his father flew into a passion, accused him of unfilial conduct, and put Jacqueline under the surveillance of her old nurse. Thenceforward she could only visit Port Royal by stealth; though she managed to keep up a correspondence with the nuns, and lived as far as was possible like a nun herself. Her only outside occupation was to collaborate with Blaise in occasional letters to Mme. Périer. The last of these was written in November, 1648, a few weeks after the carrying out of the Great Experiment.

Some time in the ensuing winter, her brother's estrangement from Port Royal began. In March, 1649, she wrote to Mme. Périer, bidding her pray God to enlighten the hearts of certain persons rather than their intellects, and manifest in them an occult force, whose potency was wondrous. These veiled phrases refer to Blaise, escaping from the power of grace. Her prayer was not granted. Her brother's return to science was just at that moment being hastened by a series of scientific successes. On the heels of the Great Experiment followed the perfecting of the arithmetical machine, for which a new patent was granted in May, in terms most flattering to the inventor. About the same time came his breach with Professor Roberval, the great enemy of Descartes; good Cartesians had long seen in him the enemy who kept the whole Pascal family from acknowledging their master. However, the bellicose professor was suddenly moved to fulminate against 'Libertines and

Deists' ; and Blaise, who rated his orthodoxy higher than his metaphysical powers, vainly tried to make him hold his tongue. Whether the resulting quarrel was cause or effect, there is no evidence to determine ; but from this time Pascal's religious ideas began to drift in a Cartesian direction. The mysticism of Port Royal he had not yet inwardly digested. Is it, then, a great wonder if he dropped it for a moment, in favour of a theology more in accord with the geometrical spirit?

At this point Stephen intervened. In May, 1649, he hurried both of his children off to Clermont, to save them from two opposite dangers—one from becoming a nun at Port Royal, the other from forsaking Port Royal altogether. Just a twelvemonth later, Blaise escaped from the eye of his family, and came back to Paris. There, at some mathematical gathering, he fell in with the young Duke of Roannez, an aristocrat of scientific tastes and fond of the society of learned men. A close alliance was struck up between them. Pascal gave the Duke informal lessons in geometry ; Roannez repaid his tutor by taking him into the world of fashion. This introduction to the salons had momentous effects. Pascal had broken away from Port Royal in the name of the geometrical spirit ; now he stood on the threshold of a realm where that spirit was scarcely more held in honour than at Port Royal itself. And the history of the next few years will be a history of how his belief in argument, as a sovereign guide through all the practical complexities of life, gradually declined and fell.

However, this new page in his life was hardly turned, when there came a sudden check. In September, 1651, Stephen Pascal died, after a very short illness. The shock brought back some half-effaced memories to the mind of his son ; and in a stately letter to Mme. Périer Blaise showed that he still could speak the dialect of Port Royal. But his return was only for the moment. The ink on his

pen was scarcely dry, before he burst out into bitter reproaches against Jacqueline for wishing to leave him, and take the veil. She answered that she had promised to wait during her father's lifetime; now he was gone, she felt herself free. During a few weeks she remained at home, while the lawyers were at work on Stephen's will, for certain complicated financial transactions were made necessary on her brother's account. Although he had a handsome salary at Rouen, Stephen's private fortune was not large, and a third share in it was little enough for one who lived in daily intercourse with dukes. But Jacqueline was willing to do anything for her brother, except remain away from the cloister. During the autumn she made over to him her whole share in her father's personal property, conditionally on her taking the veil. All was now ready for her flight, and January 4, 1652, was fixed on as the date. 'The day beforehand,' says Mme. Périer, 'my sister asked me to give my brother some hint of her intention, so that he should not be too much taken by surprise. I was as careful as I could, and made out that she was only going by way of an experiment, to see what that sort of life was like. But he was very much distressed, and went off to his room without going in to see my sister, who was in the little side-room she had turned into an oratory. There she stayed till he had gone, as she thought that seeing her would only increase his pain. I gave her the messages he had left with me, and then we, too, went to bed. But although I fully approved of what she was doing, and thought it the greatest blessing that could happen to her, I was so much overcome that I did not close my eyes all night. About seven o'clock, as she showed no signs of stirring, I thought that perhaps she had not slept, and went over to her bed, but found her fast asleep. The noise I made awoke her, and she asked what time it was. I told her, and she said that she felt very well, and had had an excellent night. Then she got up

and dressed with perfect calmness and self-control. We did not bid each other good-bye, for fear of breaking down; indeed, I hurried out of the way when I saw that she was ready to start. Thus did my sister leave the world, in the seven-and-twentieth year of her age.'

CHAPTER IX

THE CHEVALIER DE MÉRÉ

Once established at Port Royal, Jacqueline passed almost out of her brother's life. Every now and then he went to see her; and in the summer of 1652 he made a desperate attempt to get her to delay a few months before she 'received her habit'—that is, formally put on monastic dress. But Jacqueline refused to wait; on Trinity Sunday, 1652, she was enrolled as a novice. A year later, her novitiate was over, and she was anxious to take the vows. On doing so, it was usual for a nun to pay over a 'dowry' to the funds of her convent. But all Jacqueline's personal property was now in the hands of her brother, and her share in her father's real estate was equally unavailable; Stephen's three heirs had bound themselves not to dispose of their respective portions without each other's consent. This arrangement the Périers refused to disturb. Excellent Jansenists as they were, they had a large and increasing family; and, as Jacqueline said, they took the matter in an altogether worldly spirit. Remained only Blaise, but he had been living beyond his means since he took to the company of dukes. However, the great Abbess Angélique made light of the dowry, and offered to admit Jacqueline for nothing. She strictly forbade her to put any pressure on her relatives. 'They may not be rich in this world's goods,' she said, 'but they are very rich in affection, and

that must be kept alive at all costs.' But Jacqueline's heart was sore at the thought of being taken in out of charity. Besides, the old confessor, Singlin, came forward with a characteristic scruple. Unless Jacqueline gave her brother a chance of doing his duty, she would become a partaker in his sin. So it was settled that she should write to Blaise. But when her letter brought him to the convent, a fresh point of conscience uprose. Angélique was afraid lest he should give the money merely to please his sister, and that, on Jansenist principles, would be sacrilege—doing God service for the sake of man. So she insisted on seeing him herself. 'Sir,' she said, 'either give us this money as a charity, or do not give it at all. For, mark you, we have learnt from M. de Saint Cyran to take only what comes from God for the service of His House.' Blaise was overcome with surprise, and admitted that Angélique had spoken with marvellous force. As for the lawyer in attendance, his amazement knew no bounds; for the corporate avarice of nuns was proverbial throughout France. However, in the end the deed of gift was signed, and on June 5, 1653, Jacqueline was professed a nun.

The business of the dowry once settled, Blaise returned to the world. Ever since his friendship with Roannez began, he had been studying the world, as exemplified in Paris drawing-rooms; nor could he well have chosen a more auspicious moment. Henri Quatre and Richelieu had worked a social revolution when they turned the old French feudal monarchy into an administrative despotism. The civil servant grew to be a power in the land; and with him rose the financial underwriters of the ministry, bankers, tax-farmers, and big Government contractors. Even authors gained something by this elevation of the middle class, though a strong taint of Grub Street still clung about their profession. All these various groups of men were now drawn together to a common focus; for on the

centralisation of the executive followed the exaltation of the capital. Paris had at all times taken more than its due share in national affairs ; Fénelon in 'Télémaque' compares it to a huge, misshapen head set on a feeble and ill-nourished trunk. Under Henry IV and his successors the head had grown more huge than ever before. Everyone who was anyone must come to Paris, and there must rub shoulders with everyone who was anyone on other fields of enterprise. And the great problem was to reduce the resulting friction to a minimum.

The friction was all the greater, since France had only lately emerged from her mediæval barbarism. Thackeray has declared that the conversation of a fine lady of Queen Anne's time would send Victorian matrons flying from the room ; ten minutes among the heroines of Tallemant des Reaux would have turned Lady Mary Wortley Montagu into a prude. How much elemental grossness the French had still to slough off may be judged by the following catalogue of social sins, drawn up by an acknowledged master of his subject. 'There are certain things never seen in a well-bred man, but always found where breeding is not. Such are injustice, vanity, avarice, bad taste ; a coarseness smelling of the Bar, the counting-house, the provinces, the middle-class. Such, also, are slavery to custom, indulgence in commonplaces, quips and puns ; thinking more of fortune than desert, more of appearances than truth ; trying to push oneself forwards by dishonest means ; being a liar or a cheat. Such, again, are letting oneself be easily duped ; inability to read character, or know how and when to seize one's chance ; being drawn into low horse-play by fashionable boon-companions ; enduring affronts without resenting them ; siding with the strong, and neglecting the weak ; above all, lack of that indescribable quality, which ranks one well-bred man above another.'

The author of this curious catalogue was Antoine

Gombauld, Chevalier de Méré, a Poitevin gentleman of good family and moderate estate. Born about 1610, he saw some service in the field, but presently threw up his commission for a bachelor existence in Paris. Here he managed to combine the usual pleasures of his class with an apostolic zeal for good breeding. He was one of the first representatives of a new calling—the professional diners-out and specialists in good manners. These men made social intercourse the one aim of their existence ; they studied the ways of a drawing-room much as mystical writers studied the laws of the Interior Life. In their eyes good breeding was the *summum bonum*. ' Un honnête homme,' cries Méré, ' n'a rien à désirer pour sa gloire que d'être toujours honnête homme.' All values, human and divine, he translated into terms of etiquette. Truth was true, and virtue moral, precisely in so far as they ministered to the well-being of society. Religion itself he chiefly valued because ' true devoutness and Christian humility ' always lent a character new grace. He represents, in fact, a complete reaction from the ideals of the Frondeurs. They had been individualistic, self-assertive ; Méré believed in solidarity. Real enjoyment could only be purchased by associating oneself with others in common amusements, common pursuits. No doubt this meant a sacrifice. Méré always impressed upon his pupils that, in setting foot within a drawing-room, they were entering a world much larger than themselves—a world they did not make, over whose movements they had no control, and wherein they were an indistinguishable atom. But he held that the game was more than worth the candle. Society alone could hold the balance between the conflicting claims of public and private good ; it alone could make a man ' both happy and amiable at the same time,' by allowing him just so much freedom of self-assertion as accorded with the well-being of his neighbours.

To preach this doctrine both on paper and by word of mouth became the great object of Méré's life. His fame as an *arbiter elegantiarum* spread throughout the length and breadth of the land ; and his occasional essays were at once translated into English, as ' treatises of great esteem among the principal wits of France.' But his chief work lay in forming pupils for the world. A Mr. Great-heart buttoned up in the surtout of Major Pendennis, he acted as director of conscience to countless neophytes of fashion. At least two of his charges did their master credit. One was Blaise Pascal ; the other was the young and very inexperienced wife of his old friend Scarron, an elderly, crippled minor poet. At first she gave her tutor much trouble. More than once he must scold her severely for giving her sick husband's whims precedence over the sacred duties of society. But he lived to see her become Madame la Marquise de Maintenon, second wife of Louis XIV.

Pascal proved a more tractable pupil. The two met in the summer of 1652, during a trip to Poitou, of which province Roannez had become Lord Lieutenant. ' I once made an expedition with the Duke of Roannez,' writes Méré in one of his curious lay sermons. ' He talks both wisely and well, and is excellent company. With us came M. Miton, whom you know, and whom all at Court find so entertaining. As it was simply a party of pleasure, we thought of nothing but our amusement, and left few subjects untouched. The Duke is interested in mathematics, and had brought with him a man between his age and ours, who was very little known at the time, though since he has made great noise in the world. He was a great mathematician, and nothing else. But science does not teach polite behaviour, and the man had neither taste nor feeling. However, that did not prevent him from joining in everything we said and did. It seems he had a great opinion of the style of M. Du Vair, and he told us long stories of the jokes

of Mr. Recorder d'O. The last thing we wanted was to undeceive him; however, we replied straightforwardly and in our usual tone. After a day or so he noticed that there was something wrong, and interrupted no more, except for an occasional question. Every now and then he pulled out a note-book, and scribbled something down. But the odd thing was that, before we got to Poitiers, he had begun to talk quite sensibly; we could hardly have put the things better ourselves. I give you my word, the change was great indeed.'

In the end the mysterious stranger forswore mathematics in a long and eloquent speech interlarded with poetical quotations, altogether much more in the style of Méré than in that of Pascal. But the Chevalier was writing long after the event, and mainly with the object of showing how much good company could make out of the least promising materials. To literal accuracy he can lay no claim. So far from 'forswearing mathematics,' Pascal often discussed them with the Chevalier himself. For Méré, who dabbled in everything, thought not a little of his own scientific aptitudes. 'I have discovered truths so deep,' he once modestly wrote to his pupil, 'that the wisest ancients never reached them, and our best modern mathematicians stood amazed.' The truth is that at the gaming-table he had noticed certain points in mathematical probability, and duly passed them on for solution to Pascal or Judge Fermat. For here he soon got out of his depth. The geometers of the time were disputing whether an atom was divisible to infinity; and Méré, who made his imagination his guide, airily decided that it was not, and read Pascal many a lecture for dealing in the calculus. 'Bring one touch of the infinite into a question, and you weary and confuse the mind. Unsophisticated good sense leads much straighter than your demonstrations. Bear in mind that it is never deceived, and that—apart, of course, from

religious matters—whatever is opposed to it is false.' What could Pascal do, but write to Fermat that M. de Méré would be perfect, if he only had a smattering of geometry ?

Such an adjective, applied to such a man, suggests that the new Telemachus found a streak of comedy in his Mentor. Still, a finished man of the world always has a certain charm for inexperienced students. Intellectually they may think him beneath contempt, but he knows all the mystic pass-words of a realm from which they cannot but feel their own remoteness. Pascal will presently describe how surely abstractions build up a wall between the scholar and his fellows ; in proportion as his knowledge grows, his humanity departs. Besides, the Chevalier's polish threw a certain fascination over one brought up among the learned squabbles of the Paris Club. There the prevailing influence had been men like Roberval and Descartes ; trumpeting forth one's own discoveries, and picking holes in those of others had seemed the two main businesses of life. How deeply Pascal himself had drunk of this spirit his pamphlets on the vacuum have shown, though still more piquant proof is afforded by a curious letter written to Queen Christine of Sweden a few months before the meeting with Méré. To the arithmetical machine was due this correspondence with the daughter of Gustavus Adolphus. Finally patented in 1651, it had brought its inventor renown abroad as well as at home ; and his fellow-countryman, Dr. Bourdelot, physician to the Swedish Court, encouraged him to send a model to Christine. At this time the wildest rumours were afloat about the patroness of Descartes. It was thought that she was about to carry through in Stockholm what Plato had failed to do at Syracuse, and establish a philosophic State among the fogs of the barbaric North. How much distance had to do with this enchantment was seen when Christine came to Paris some years later. But at present every learned eye in

France was turned towards her; and new inventions were not considered to be launched upon their course until her royal pleasure had been taken on them. Accordingly to Stockholm went a model of the arithmetical machine, together with the following dedication.

'Were my health equal to my zeal,' Pascal wrote, 'no hands but mine should lay this offering at the feet of the first Princess in Christendom. The pains it has cost me need no telling; but they will be more than repaid, if this fruit of years of labour yields Your Majesty some few moments of satisfaction. Some will tax me with presumption for daring to present it; but I was led on by the union in Your Sacred Person of two things I deeply revere, sovereign authority and sound learning. For I hold in the profoundest veneration those raised to the highest places, whether of power or knowledge. If I mistake not, these last may also claim the title of sovereign. Genius has its tables of precedency, no less than royal Courts; and the authority of sovereigns over their subjects is only a parable of the authority of greater over lesser minds. Nay, this second empire is the higher, inasmuch as merit alone apportions it; whereas the other lies at the mercy of birth or fortune. But, great as is each sovereignty, either alone is incomplete. Genius is weighed down through being the subject of another; and I know not whether history can furnish the names of even moderately learned kings. Perfection waited for the age wherein Your Majesty was born. And that the marvel might be greater, the part strong men could not undertake is played by a young Queen, in whom the wisdom of experience unites with the tenderness of youth, leisure for study with the business of a Throne, and profundity of learning with the weakness of her sex.'

One may hear the groans of Méré, as he read this strange dedication. Not that he paid much heed to the points that strike posterity the most. The adulation did not

shock him, and the lofty, intellectual pride behind was far above his head. But what should he say to its stilted epigrams—Méré, who desired to banish these affectations altogether, as being ' more fit for the Delphic Oracle than for civilised intercourse.' Still worse was it when the young inventor went on to allude complacently to his own labours ; for one of the very first signs of good breeding was avoidance of any show of effort. All a gentleman did must seem as though done by a mere turn of his wrist. There was nothing for it but a thorough course of discipline in writing, talking and behaviour. Pascal was remorselessly driven to routs, to theatres, to tennis-courts ; it even seems likely that he faced the terrors of the dancing class.

Not that the Chevalier would have agreed with Hippolyte Taine in calling Turveydrop the pivot of the Old Régime. In his own way he was a philosopher, and it was on the philosophical side of his teaching that he set the greatest store. Why was it wrong to indulge in epigram, or make much of one's own achievements ? Méré answered that the first duty of a gentleman was to ' cover his *Moi*,' to keep his Ego in the background. Second-rateness came away from a party wondering whether it had taken every opportunity to shine, whereas a gentleman wasted no thought on his own performances ; all he asked was whether the party, in general, had been a success. That was why Méré was so severe on all who tried to draw too much attention to themselves—epigrammatists ; *précieuses* eager to show off their emotional intensity ; professional jesters, who needs must drag their fire-works into everything. But he was equally stern towards another class of offenders. These were the scholars and professional men, who talked too much on their own subject, because they had nothing else to talk about. ' What ? So-and-so is a fine mathematician, you say ? Well, I don't care about mathematics ; he would take me for a proposition. And the next man's

a good soldier? Then he would treat me like a beleaguered town.'[1] Soldier and mathematician both wore their professions chalked up on their forehead, and the very constitution of the salons cried out against such an uncovering of the *Moi*. These brought together a medley of distinguished persons drawn from all classes of society. But class-prejudice dies hard, more especially among feminine surroundings; and the only hope of sending it to sleep was by keeping social distinctions in the background. Hence, Méré lays down the fundamental axiom that a gentleman has no trade. He may be unfortunate enough to have to earn his bread at a calling, but neither his words nor his manners betray what that calling is. As Pascal said, he 'hangs out no signboard'; nobody can guess whether he is noble, writer, banker or official. His distinguishing mark is his 'universality'; there is something about him of every class, and everything of none.

Besides, the salon itself must be universal. It was a social assemblage, where everyone must take his part; and the chief business of a hostess lay in keeping conversation down to the level of her dullest guests. Many slaked their intellectual thirst on small, grammatical questions of the kind made fashionable by Vaugelas—as to the precise significance of *car*, and whether it was better to say *je puis* or *je peux*. But higher flights were often attempted. One of the company read a short paper on wit, or taste, or some such general subject, and the rest went through it clause by clause. Or else the paper was not read out, but passed round from hand to hand. Méré's own essays, and much of La Rochefoucauld and Saint Évremond, were intended for this private circulation. Indeed, it was anything but well-bred to be in a hurry to print. Hacks might write for the general public: a gentleman only wrote for his friends. Literature, in fact, became little

[1] Pascal, *Pens.* 36.

more than extended conversation. An author's business was to set discussion going, or sum it up in some pregnant phrase; he triumphed, when he could express everybody's thoughts in a style beyond everybody's command. Novelty was not much welcomed. Original thinkers were apt to be too full of themselves and their own ideas; Pascal compares them to those worthy citizens, who are always advertising the fact that they own the freehold of their house. Besides, it was one thing to put down brilliant novelties on paper, and quite another to declaim them to a very critical circle well endowed with sense of humour. Most of the audience, too, were fellow-craftsmen in manuscript, if not in print; and they were much less interested to hear what the evening's entertainer had to say, than how he said it. 'What is the good of telling me that I say nothing new?' Pascal asks a captious critic. 'At tennis both players use the same ball, but one of them pitches it better than the other.'

This minute attention to language was a direct fruit of the Chevalier's teaching. In his youthful scientific pamphlets Pascal had argued away in vigorous, if somewhat pedestrian style; though, if some resonant phrase occurred to him, he put it down without stopping to consider whether it was too 'luxuriant' for its homely context. Méré now opened a campaign against these purple patches. Pascal learnt—to take only his own examples—that it was wrong to talk about 'quenching the torch of sedition,' and safer to call a king a king than to style him an august monarch. For the Chevalier made clear to him that to shoot scraps of sudden bombast into the middle of a tranquil argument was an outrage on society. 'The secret of good breeding,' he said, 'is to do what is natural to us in a becoming way.' But it is not natural in me to talk of august monarchs, nor is it natural to my hearers to hear kings thus described. Such verbiage only ruffles them, and distracts their attention

from the point. Worse still, it breaks the bond of sympathy I ought to have established with them. They feel I am not one of themselves, speaking the plain, straightforward tongue of common sense ; I have wrapped my meaning up in an unreal, professional jargon worthy of one who is ' more of an author than a man.' Some may think my fine language impressive, and it certainly gives me a chance of showing off my cleverness ; but the plain man does not feel in reading me what Pascal came to feel in reading Montaigne—that he only saw set down in print what had long been vaguely in his mind.

However, the bond of sympathy required much more than careful picking of one's phrases. In habits of thought, as well as in language, a writer must be universal. He must fall into step with the minds of his readers, and keep well within the boundaries of common sense ; for common sense was the natural standard for a mixed group of amateurs to apply. Was a moral sentiment true ? Was a situation lifelike, or a character well drawn ? Only common sense could say. Very soon its utterances became infallible. Already Méré has condemned the infinitesimal calculus in its name ; and many of his wiser moments were spent in contrasting it with the methods of scholasticism, greatly to their disadvantage. ' Instead of seeking for enlightenment, the one object of the Doctors is to catch each other out by means of forced, unreal distinctions, and terms they do not understand themselves. Really, the only rule is to follow breeding and common sense. These false subtleties are never approved by persons of good taste ; they make reason their one law.' What, then, did that law enjoin ? That a man should always think and speak as unaffectedly and simply as an average audience could bear. So, at least, Pascal understood his master. ' Good things,' he cries, ' are the commonest of all. They are natural, within our grasp, and before the eyes of all the world.

The only difficulty is how to get to know them. Nowhere is excellence attained by being stilted or eccentric. We reach upwards to grasp it; we should often do better to stoop down. The best books are those that make the reader think he could have written quite as well himself. Nature, who alone is good, is quite familiar and common.'

If the philosophy of this passage is dubious, its literary moral was excellent. In the hands of Molière and Boileau common sense became a deadly weapon against *précieuses*, epigrammatists, and the whole tribe of posturers, all of them 'stilted and eccentric.' Common sense was not good enough for them; as Pascal said, they must 'mask and disguise' reality under the subtle vagaries of their fancy or bursts of high-flown rhetoric. Thus common sense did for literature what the geometrical spirit had already done for science. Between the two there were great likenesses. Both threw over specialism, and strove hard to bring their secrets within reach of the multitude; both would willingly have undertaken—as Malebranche actually undertook—to make an intelligent Chinaman accept all their ideas, if only he could be induced to lend them his attention. Nay, there were ties of blood between them; for the geometrical spirit only claimed to be common sense applied in orderly, systematic fashion. It prided itself on its power of advancing from easy things to difficult, without ever turning its back on a difficulty, or taking one step in its proof for granted. Unfortunately, order and system are ill at ease in a drawing-room. Casual auditors will not sit by, while they probe every possible doubt to the bottom, or elaborately guard against every unlikely objection. The dread reproach of 'pedantry' soon fastens on their efforts, and Méré appears with a definition of that ugly vice ready in his hand. 'The pedants delight in laying down rules, most of which are false. They roll up what is not worth saying into mysterious definitions, harder to grasp than

the things themselves. It costs them infinite pains to tell one something about a subject without going into its whole length and breadth; for all their knowledge is so joined together that every part depends on all the rest. Their mind is wound up like a watch. The hands cannot pause at ten o'clock, if the works go on till twelve; and yet there is no surer sign of ill breeding than not knowing when to stop. Of a thousand things in one's mind it is often proper only to allude to one, and quite casually to that.'

This truth the Chevalier impressed on Pascal very early in his social career. About the time he was writing his letter to Queen Christine, his arithmetical machine had commended itself to another lady of rank. This was the Duchess of Aiguillon, Richelieu's niece, who had proved such a good friend to the Pascal family some dozen years before. In the summer of 1652 she arranged for him to give some popular lectures on his machine tc a fashionable audience at her house. This invitation brought the lecturer face to face with a problem new to his scientific mind. Hitherto he had lived in a circle where grace and piquancy went for little in comparison with rigorous exactitude. Now he suddenly found himself in a world which cared exceedingly little for accuracy, but very much for whatever excited its interest. No doubt, in a vague way the Duchess's friends believed that they were led by reason; but in practice they followed the 'low, unworthy and unnatural course' of caring for things because they liked them, without much inquiry into their truth. What, then, was the use of talking logic to such people? And, if he once threw over logic, what was a lecturer to do? In this dilemma Pascal appealed to Méré, and the Chevalier promptly decided in favour of the Duchess. The methods of the Paris Club were quite unsuited to a drawing-room. There few hearers had the power to keep up with long, straight marches from point to point; what they liked was to be carried along a 'natural,

hidden train of argument, in no way suggestive of art or study.' But how was a lecturer to hit on this hidden train? Méré answered that he must 'sacrifice to the Goddess of Grace,' and gauge the temper of his audience by 'little signs' beneath the notice of a pedant. 'You have never shaken off,' he told his pupil, 'the geometrical habit of trusting to long demonstrations drawn out line by line. Thereby you let slip a golden opportunity. A man of keen perceptions and quick wits often gleans invaluable hints from the looks and carriage of his neighbours. If you ask him—as you are sure to do—on what principle he goes, he will probably answer that he cannot tell, and that the signs are only evidence for him. You think you do much better with your mathematical methods. I assure you, on my honour, you are wrong; for the proofs you think so much of are only good for prigs and fools.' And when the pupil characteristically asked for a definition of these signs, his despairing Mentor could only bid him fall in love with a woman of the world.

Whether Pascal took this advice is still matter for dispute. Many writers think he did, and identify him with the Blaise Pascal whom Bishop Fléchier describes as carrying on a heavy flirtation with a young Clermont *précieuse*, 'the Sappho of the town.' But Fléchier was only retailing stale gossip at second hand; it is possible that he confused the great Blaise with a cousin of the same name, a judge in one of the Clermont courts. All that is certain is that Pascal began to pay a new attention to the Chevalier's 'little signs.' On his first entry into the salons he had simply been bewildered by their unfamiliar bustle. Now he was coming to realise the force of Méré's dictum that society is like a foreign language; at first one hardly understands a word, but by and bye the meaning of things begins to dawn. As his experience broadened, he felt increasing confidence in his own capacity to read the fashionable

zodiac ; and his final conclusions on the matter are recorded in that curious passage in his ' Pensées,' where he discusses why men of action care so little for mathematics, and why mathematicians are so seldom men of action. ' Geometers never see what is before their eyes. They are brought up among the principles of science, clear and tangible every one ; and all the arguments they employ have been carefully tested beforehand. Hence they are puzzled when they have to deal with evidence of a different kind. Here the points are almost imperceptible ; they are not so much seen as felt ; a man will hardly be got to notice them at all, if he does not do so naturally. They are so numerous and delicate that the very nicest judgment is needed to seize them and draw the right conclusions ; for they cannot be set down in order, like the propositions of mathematics. The mind must take them in at a glance, rather than by any conscious process ; geometers only make themselves ridiculous when they insist on applying their axioms and definitions to matters incapable of such handling. Not but what the mind *does* reason about them after a silent, instinctive fashion of its own, beyond the power of most to grasp, and of any man to explain.' [1]

Silent, instinctive modes of reasoning play a great part in Méré's books. In those days society was a new institution. Men felt raw and uncomfortable in a salon ; they had no inherited fund of tact to tell them how to entertain a lady, or enter a room with ease. In their perplexities they caught at argument, much as drowning sailors catch at a hen-coop ; they solemnly proved to themselves and their neighbours that whatever they did, or omitted to do, was justified by all the laws of logic. Méré made a gallant effort to persuade them that life was too short for this perpetual dialectic. The man who was always explaining the how and why of his conduct was an ill-bred bore ; every

[1] *Pens.* 1.

flush on his self-conscious face was an additional proof that he had never learnt that the first duty of a gentleman is to keep his *Moi* 'covered' in society. Besides, experience showed that the instincts of an average man led quite as straight as his syllogisms. Méré would certainly have endorsed the famous counsel Lord Mansfield gave to an inexperienced colleague on the Bench, never to explain the grounds of his decisions; for the judgments themselves would often be right, but the reasons were certain to be wrong. Méré had not learning enough to discourse upon the desirability of avoiding 'interstitial thought,' in the style of Professor William James; but in a dim way he felt that tact and taste were 'based on very solid foundations, although they were chary of giving their reasons.' But social success by no means depended on ability to 'give one's reasons.' The Duchess of Lesdiguières, for instance, looked, dressed, talked better than any other woman of her time; but neither she nor anyone else—and Méré more than once put her through a searching cross-examination—could explain how she reached these desirable results. 'Vos grâces sont si libertines,' the Chevalier told her, 'qu'elles renvoient bien loin l'art et l'étude.'

Did, then, the whole secret lie in sending away art and study in the way Luther besought the Protestant world to 'send away Moses and his Law'? Clearly not: society knew no analogue to conversion and its awakening of 'spiritual sense.' Good taste came naturally to no one, except a few ladies *extrêmément nées*. Could it, then, be acquired? The Chevalier felt very doubtful. 'Neither rules, nor maxims, nor even science, turn out good labourers or great men. What we need is judgment, tact and quickness, the power of seeing in a moment what is the right thing to do, and drawing all the help we can from times and circumstances. These things no generalities can teach.' Not only rules, but masters were a failure. 'At first sight,' the Chevalier

said to his old friend, Marshal Clérambauld, 'one would think that, if a tutor were as well-bred as Pignatelli is said to have been a good riding-master, he would turn out first-class gentlemen as easily as Pignatelli turned out good horsemen. Why is it that this is not the case?' All the Marshal could suggest was that we knew much more about the movements of the body than about those of the mind. That being so, the Chevalier decided that the best thing was to trust the mind itself; as good breeding could not be pumped into a pupil from without, it must be left to grow up from within. Of course, he would serve his social apprenticeship under the eye of a watchful master; but, as he grew older and more experienced, this surveillance would gradually be withdrawn. He would then be able to judge for himself along the lines of 'an indefinable something, that goes quicker, and sometimes straighter, than reflection. Judgment points out the means of perfection, and the heart comes in to put them in practice. For breeding is no barren theory; it must act, and it must rule.'

The heart must come in, for Méré was a devout believer in the virtue of enthusiasm. Du Vair and the Stoical school had made war on the passions: Méré was their ardent apologist. 'So far from getting rid of them, we ought to increase their number, if we could. A man who is touched at nothing, whose feelings are never roused, is a weariness to himself, and a nuisance to his neighbours. Whereas, to be touched by everything that attracts reasonable people is a sure road to their hearts.' Hence he was careful to develop the emotional side of a pupil's character. Under his guidance Pascal entered on a serious study of the feelings, alike in literature and life. He yawned over Mlle. de Scudéry's interminable romances; he made acquaintance with Mme. de Sablé, a widowed Marchioness some fifty years old, famous alike for her intellectual salon, her excellent cook, and her excessive terror of infectious complaints. Often

he went to see his sister's old friend, Mondory, act in the pieces of Corneille—with what result may be judged from a declaration made after his Jansenist asceticism had set in with full severity. 'Every kind of amusement is fraught with danger to a Christian, but of all the diversions the world has invented, there is none worse than the play. There real emotions are portrayed so truthfully that they wake again in ourselves. Love, in particular, wears a mask of innocence and nobility; it seems so pure that it deceives the purest. Its transports appeal to our self-love; we long to be the means of kindling such a flame ourselves. Its noble language sends to sleep the scruples of chaste souls; they think that chastity cannot be harmed by loving so wise a love.' [1]

Love naturally engaged the chief of Pascal's attention. It was a subject much studied in the salons, and many and various were the theories in vogue. Some swore by the views laid down in Descartes' 'Treatise on the Passions.' There emotion is declared an excellent servant, but a wretched master. It is good in so far as it strengthens and supports the will; it is bad in so far as it tries to take the lead itself. But a well-trained will has its passions under perfect control, and can switch them on or off at pleasure. Suppose, for instance, reason tells Bélisandre that Elmire would make him an excellent wife, his will might very properly call up the passion of love; but, if he reversed the process, and let his passion dictate to his will, he would be unworthy of the name of rational man. 'Sir,' the philosopher would say to him, as Seneca actually says to Scarron in Fontenelle's 'Dialogues of the Dead,' 'you follow your temperament more than your reason.' And that was the most freezing term of contempt in the whole Cartesian dictionary. For 'temperament' included imagination, appetites, feelings—in short, our whole nature, apart from will and reason. And

[1] *Pens.* 11.

the great originality of Descartes lay in insisting that all of these had their roots in physiology. Will and intellect went their own way, but passion was conditioned by the body. That being so, it fell under the sway of universal mechanism. On the corporal side men were mere machines —' and very disagreeable machines at that,' Pascal adds, with characteristic emphasis. But he was much more taken by the Cartesian metaphor than by its underlying conclusions ; and the chief effect of the treatise was to fill him with unbounded contempt for clockwork regularity of life. He became fond of contrasting—not, perhaps, without a sigh—' tumultuous ' young gallants of the Court with their tame rivals of the town. ' The first are all on fire ; the second lead a slow, monotonous existence. But it is head-strong dash that strikes and dazzles, and carries the day.'

At the opposite pole from Descartes stood Pascal's new friend, Mme. de Sablé. She was a zealous patroness of certain romantic ideas of chivalry and disinterested love—ideas already ridiculed by Cervantes, and soon to be pilloried again by Molière. But Mme. de Sablé did not read ' Don Quixote ' ; and the ' Femmes Savantes ' were still to come. In her drawing-room languishing ladies could analyse their souls in peace ; while even Pascal bent an awkward, scholarly knee in this House of Rimmon, and indulged in banal commonplaces about ' happy the life that begins with love, and ends with ambition.' Under all this froth, however, Mme. de Sablé and her friends were pursuing a very definite aim. In maintaining that ' love is not given to the soul, except as joined to the body,' they declared that Descartes had degraded it to the level of an appetite ; whereas they were resolved to make it into a purely intellectual passion, free from all earthly taint. Herein they joined hands with the *précieuses*, official champions of feminine intelligence. They were revolted at the thought of being wooed simply for their good looks.

'L'approbation des yeux,' says Somaize, 'est d'un ordre inférieur au mérite de ces belles. Elles s'élèvent par la raison et l'esprit, et tâchent de fonder en droit les passions qu'elles peuvent faire naître.' Molière does not exaggerate when he makes Armande tell her lover :

> Eh bien, monsieur, eh bien, puisque, sans m'écouter
> Vos sentiments brutaux veulent se contenter ;
> Puisque, pour vous réduire à des ardeurs fideles,
> Il faut des noeuds de chair, des chaînes corporelles,
> Si ma mère le veut, je résous mon esprit
> A consentir.

Such was the state of the case when Pascal sat down to write his 'Treatise on the Passions of Love'—if indeed the treatise be really his ; for the authorship has never been fully proved, although no modern editor doubts it. Nor is it a 'treatise' so much as a series of scattered reflections, brought together, by some hand unknown, from stray contributions to salon-debate or the autograph albums of friends. However, some bold spirits have made it throw light on Pascal's personal history. From certain expressions they infer that he was at one time deeply in love with a young lady above him in rank, to whom he never dared declare his passion. And certainly he enlarges on some of the commoner signs of love—as, for instance, how the gallant's eyes brighten and pale at the same moment —and discusses the effects that love of a patrician maiden has on suitors of humbler birth. But there is nothing in his descriptions beyond what a novel, or an evening at the play, might have taught spectators less impressionable than he ; while, as to the difference of rank, the salons went through all possible 'cases of love' as carefully as a Jesuit casuist went through all possible cases of conscience. Escobar himself was not more at home among the various aspects of a homicide than was Mlle. de Scudéry examining each phase of King Cophetua's passion for the beggar maid, or that of her own Queen Cléobuline for Myrrhinus.

Besides, Pascal had more important work on hand than revealing imaginary secrets of the heart. His real business was to hold the balance between Mme. de Sablé and Descartes. Each seemed to him to have pushed an initial half-truth to lengths altogether absurd. Descartes did perfectly right to insist that love is rooted in a very primitive instinct; he did wrong to box it up in 'temperament,' as though in a kind of water-tight compartment. Mme. de Sablé had good cause for objecting that there is an intellectual element in love; but she went astray when she resolved the whole of love into that one element alone. If it were simply an abstraction of the reason—'an ideal of pure beauty, limited and circumscribed by the difference of sex'—it would be like the truths of mathematics, which are one and the same all over the world; and it would certainly stand in some fixed relation to beauty. But experience knows nothing of such a relation, or of any fixed standard of beauty. Masculine appreciation varies from age to age, from country to country, even from man to man. Custom and fashion have much to say. 'There is a time for blondes, and a time for brunettes.' Even contemporaries differ. 'That is why each gallant thinks his own mistress the prettiest, and makes her his standard of beauty.' But, at least, if two men love the same girl, both will give the same reasons for falling at her feet? Even this last plank in Mme. de Sablé's platform is torn away by experience. One girl may certainly enslave a mathematician and a man of action, but they will be drawn to her by quite different charms.

Was, then, Descartes right in maintaining that love was a mere irrational caprice? By no means. It begins, no doubt, as a dumb yearning; but that yearning is speedily seized upon, moulded, coloured, transformed by every faculty in our nature. And in this transforming process no agent has a larger share than intellect. To call an absent

passion into being is, indeed, beyond its powers; but it can do much to hasten the growth of a seed already sown. It directs the whole strategy of courtship—in Pascal's day a long and highly complicated art. 'Love quickens the wits; it lives by the wits; for there is no small craft in loving. Every day a man exhausts the means of giving pleasure. But he must still go on doing so, and on he goes.' At every step, also, he discovers a new charm in his mistress. He begins to gain an insight into the how and the why of his passion; motives for preference, which at first he hardly understood himself, now became explicit. Why, then, deny the intellectual element in love? 'It is an act of thought, even though our choice be made in haste, without weighing the arguments on either side. The poets did wrong to say that Love is blind. Let us tear off the bandage, and henceforward grant him the use of his eyes.' That done, reason need not fear to follow where passion shows the way. Nor need the timorous suitor hesitate because he cannot call in the geometrical spirit, and prove the unique fascinations of his mistress by an argument in form. If he feels them, it is enough; he does not need to make the wisdom of his choice equally convincing to all beings of equal rationality. 'I agree with him who said that a lover forgets fortune, family and friends. His heart is so full of love that it has no room for other cares. Passion needs must be extravagant, and a suitor recks little of what the world says. He knows that it cannot be too hard upon him, for reason quite approves his conduct.'

Such, in brief outline, were Pascal's views on love. Critics have sometimes been at pains to ask why the only known copy of his essay should have been preserved in a bundle of Jansenist sermons. They might have spared themselves the trouble. Love, as here depicted, is what Pascal would have called a 'figure' of Irresistible Grace; and his essay contains in germ the main argument of the 'Pensées.'

CHAPTER X

THE HEIRS OF MONTAIGNE

'One would think that your old friends keep but a small place in your remembrance,' wrote Méré to Mme. de Maintenon, when his former pupil was already standing on the steps of Louis XIV's throne. Whether Pascal was more grateful history does not say. Certain it is that the Chevalier soon dropped into the background, for the author of the 'Essay on Love' had learnt all he could teach. Nor was he always an accessible Mentor. Like another great moralist of later date, Pascal loved to cross his legs, and have his talk out. But Méré was a man of the world, and suffered heavily from the toll the world levies on its devotees. Ennui descended on him like a cloud, if he was forced to spend too much time on one subject. Then, too, he measured discussion by a test worthy of Caliph Omar himself. Either it threw fresh light on problems of etiquette, or it did not; in the latter case it was useless. But Pascal had begun to wonder whether this entire devotion to good breeding was not defeating its own ends. Indeed, Méré himself was dimly stumbling towards the paradox of manners—namely, that the best way to acquire them is to think about them as little as one can. Every now and then he dropped mysterious hints about an 'extraordinary merit,' that could afford to dispense with conventions, because its mind was set on higher things. This extraordinary merit was embodied in

his friend Miton, the fourth member of the famous expedition to Poitou.

Miton was a middle-aged man, who had risen from small beginnings by the peculiar charm of his manners. Amongst other things this had brought him a comfortable sinecure; he was Clerk of the Cheque to the Scots Guards of Louis XIV. Unlike Méré, he did not fight shy of wedlock. But his first wife had died early; and it was only quite at the end of his days that he contracted a characteristic second marriage with his cook. When Pascal met him, he was living much the same bachelor existence as Méré, and was equally immersed in the study of *honnêteté*. In their very ceremonious correspondence each is fond of styling the other an 'excellent workman of good breeding.' But although Miton paid many compliments to Méré, they just lack the tone of reverence pervading Méré's compliments to Miton; and it is significant that in the 'Pensées,' where the Chevalier's name is never mentioned, Pascal takes Miton as his type of the well-bred man. Constant preoccupation with behaviour made Méré fussy and self-conscious; whereas Miton had a peculiar knack of putting everyone at ease. So far from wishing to shine, his indolent good nature actually preferred the background; as Pascal says, his chief fault was that he never roused himself, and was always dissuading his friends from any kind of effort. One day Méré wrote to announce that he had a big book in contemplation. 'You think of adding an imperishable monument to literature,' answered Miton, certainly without a thought of sarcasm. 'I am sure that no one is better qualified to do so than yourself. But is it worth the while? Deep meditation is dangerous to health, and the reward is small. Never to let one's mind stray beyond trifles is the safest rule.' And he remained staunch to this principle, even when his own interests were concerned. To Méré's horror, he would take no steps when a piratical bookseller printed one of his

essays as a supposed work of Saint Évremond. 'Such modesty,' wrote the Chevalier, 'only exasperates those of your friends, who take an interest in your reputation.' Nor was this the only time when Méré had much ado to justify his friend's nonchalance, even on the score of 'extraordinary merit.' There was an agitated correspondence, when Miton—always something of an invalid—went off to nurse a bad stiff neck at the baths of Bourbon, and there so far forgot himself as to call on a young lady in his bedroom-slippers. To confound confusion, Mlle. B. was so much enraptured by his conversation as entirely to overlook the deficiencies of his foot-gear. Méré could only shake his head, and feel that the whole proceeding had passed beyond his ken.

But if Miton was less conventional than Méré, his mind was more evenly balanced. At odd moments—chiefly when he was pressed for money, and went off to the country to retrench—the Chevalier's pen ran off into rhapsodies almost worthy of the age of Rousseau. He was fond of contrasting artificial Paris, 'whose fine days are not made by the sun,' with the simple joys of nature—feathered songsters, rustling streamlets, lowing kine. But Miton cut him very short. 'I am glad your vines and fruit-trees are doing so well,' wrote back the cynical epicure. 'But I should think you still better off in St. Thomas-by-the-Louvre Street, although there are neither gardens nor vines.' This brusqueness was much appreciated by Blaise Pascal, whose teeth a gushing enthusiasm always set on edge. And he sat by approvingly, when Miton wrote to Méré: 'I expect that cards and ladies have more than consoled you for my absence; but of that I cannot complain. When dreamers like ourselves run up against a pleasure, no one ought to grudge it them. For my own part, I find little to attract me; and were it not for certain ideas that amuse me—though half of them are full of folly, and the other half of

vanity—I would let everything go cheap.' Later on Pascal began to ask himself whether Miton's 'Weltschmerz' was worth much more than Méré's sentimentality. At present he pronounced the Clerk of the Cheque a greater philosopher than either Plato or Descartes.

Miton's philosophy consisted in being what the age called a 'Libertine'—that is, one *aequo liberior, justo licentior*, as the dictionary-makers said. The Libertines represented, in fact, the spirit of independence already seen at Port Royal and at the Paris Club; though their revolt was not limited to particular questions, but spread to each and every point of religion, morality, and custom. Not that the Libertines had any definite programme, or indeed any very strictly defined common characteristics. There were men of fashion among them, like Miton and Saint Évremond; there were book-worms of encyclopædic knowledge, like Gabriel Naudé and La Mothe Le Vayer; while behind these came a Bacchanalian phalanx drawn from Grub Street or the taverns, and led by wild poets like Cyrano de Bergerac or Théophile de Viau. Some of them were libertines in the English sense; others bore characters without a stain. Many were undoubtedly free-thinkers. On others Bossuet had his eye, when he denounced the kind of men who wished there were no God. Others owed their place in the band to an incurable propensity for making wicked jokes about the clergy. To this last class belonged Gui Patin. Neither an unbeliever nor a rake, he incarnates Libertinism in its purest form; for his hand was against every venerable institution—whether ecclesiastical or civil—just because it was venerable, and an institution. To be in a minority of one was his purest joy. Very characteristic is his saying that, if he had been in Rome on certain Ides of March, Julius Cæsar's body would have had a round two dozen wounds.

What was mere perverseness in Gui Patin became a more

formidable quality in the wild young poets who hung about Des Barreaux. His was a reputation of a very lurid type. Even Patin, no very rigid censor, denounces him as a blasphemous profligate; and Pascal had good reason to choose him as the type of those who deliberately drown their intellect in their passions. Indeed, he survives in literature by the choice couplet:

Par ma raison je butte
A devenir bête brute.

Still, his 'impieties' were of a trivial sort enough. They come to little more than saying that he bore no grudge against his Maker; he had only forgotten Him, as he hoped himself to be forgotten on the Last Day. To shock anyone who could be shocked was his main object; and naturally he and his followers turned their chief attention to the clergy. To annoy them it was not even necessary to be learned; nothing, in fact, annoyed their victims more than a bland admission of ignorance. Mersenne himself lost his temper, and called them a gang of know-nothings, who chattered away like parrots in a cage, without the least notion of what they meant. They thought it rather fine to know no Greek or Latin, so long as they could prove their wit by laughing at religion. This judgment was more than endorsed by the Jesuit preacher Garasse, famous for the vigour with which he called a spade a spade. 'All our young Libertines know is the right way to tipple. None the less, their mouths are full of what they call "my doctrine" —"the doctrine of all thinking men"—as though it were a new philosophy only just discovered. At any rate, their way of studying it is new. Their school is a tavern, their rostrum a dinner-table, their professors are good cooks, and their academical exercises are banquets at half-a-crown a head. Their genius takes its highest flight in an ode, a sonnet, a satire, a neat paragraph, or a paradox. Thank goodness, it only takes them six months to turn off a sonnet to a

street-girl, or an ode to the dinner-bell, with an average of six glasses to the verse ; for their inspiration soon runs dry, unless it is moistened from a pint-pot. They say that deep learning is not for them, and think it exquisitely funny to explain that they are neither philosophers nor divines ; indeed, the only thing they understand is how to rhyme themselves into a dinner for nothing.'

These attacks the Libertines placidly put down to jealousy. They flattered themselves—not entirely without justice—that they were supplanting the confessors in the favour of the great. For in large houses it was still the fashion to keep a learned man as a kind of paid guide, philosopher and friend ; and many of the more frivolous nobles cared little who did their thinking for them, so long as it was done amusingly. And certainly the Libertines got much amusement out of Garasse himself. To make up a party to go and bait him was one of their favourite sports. He describes how they used to descend on a convent, in order to ask the monks on the quiet whether they really believed in God ; and they generally timed their visit so as to arrive just before the dinner-bell rang. This was the occasion of fresh witticisms on the absurdity of tying one's appetite down to fixed hours ; whereas a sensible man would suit his meal-times to his appetite. Still, they were capable of higher flights. The better to torment Garasse, they laid in a stock of theological knowledge. ' They hunt through the Holy Scriptures,' groaned the pestered Jesuit, ' much as donkeys hunt for thistles. They say the Bible is a pretty book, and full of excellent things ; but it is going rather far to expect a sensible man to swallow it all, down to the tail of Tobit's dog. Another of their favourite points is to charge God with injustice. They will admit the existence of angels, since we seem so set upon it ; they will even accept our accounts of the Garden of Eden, as a piece of tavern civility. But to say that the angels fell, because they did

not know how to make a curtsey, or that such noble creatures as ourselves will be damned for eating one cursed apple—that is a little too much.'

In much the same spirit they discussed the problem of a future life.

> J'ai vescu sans souci, et je meurs sans regret.
> Personne ne me plaint, et je ne plains personne.
> Pour le lieu où je vais c'est un trop grand segret
> Je le laisse à vuider à Messieurs de Sorbonne.

quotes Garasse from one of their own poets; and adds the commentary: 'They say that immortality is doubtful; so we had much better keep a tight hold on present pleasures than howl for imaginary moons in the future. Thus do they put the glories of Paradise up to auction. They let the joys of the Blessed, and the whole furniture of the Empyræan, go for a song; as though the Almighty had gone bankrupt, and were forced to compound with His creditors by a forced sale. They say that only a malignant lunatic could have invented hell, and that the best cure for such silly fancies is a thorough souse.' All the same, there was more in Libertinism than liquor, as Garasse himself knew perfectly well. The Jesuit put his finger on the spot when he said that the very quintessence of atheism was the doctrine that anyone might believe whatever he thought fit. Libertinism put on many different shapes and forms—there is little superficial likeness between Des Barreaux and Saint Évremond—but at bottom both were members of the famous abbey established by King Gargantua. 'All the life of the Thelemites was spent not in laws, statutes or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure. In all their rule and strictest tie of their Order there was this one clause to be observed: *Do as thou wouldst.* Because men that are free, well-born, well-bred, and conversant in honest companies, have naturally an instinct and spur that prompteth them unto virtuous actions, and withdraws them

from vice, which is called honour; those same men, when by base subjection and constraint they are brought under and kept down, turn aside from that noble disposition which is called virtue, to shake off and break that band of servitude wherein they are so tyrannously enslaved. For it is agreeable with the nature of man to long after things forbidden, and to desire what is denied us.'

This profession of faith all Libertines would have subscribed, provided that each was allowed to interpret the 'natural instinct and spur' after his own fashion. Garasse's tormentors had no doubts about its meaning. 'Their first and fundamental maxim is that God is Nature, and Nature God. This natural God, or divinised Nature loves all her works, according as it is written in Genesis: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." The soul is good, the body good, the senses and their organs good; pleasure is good, fruits and meats and creatures are all good. For our kind Mother could never have called us to a life of troubles, thorns and disappointments. Even the beasts she has only created to browse peacefully along, enjoying the fruits of her bounty as they go. For all and sundry Nature keeps open house. Her world is like the treasury of Crœsus, where all his friends are welcome, provided that they take away as much as they can carry. But man, beyond all doubt, is the chief effort of Nature. He is the soul of the world according to Plato, its microcosm in the eyes of Aristotle, its temple and its altar in the opinion of Trismegistus. That being so, we men cannot be lower than the beasts. They may enjoy their pleasures without shame—may eat and drink and sleep, may increase and multiply. Why, then, may we not do the same? Must we, the masters, fall so low as to be jealous of our servants?' The answer was clear enough: men must follow the promptings of Nature. 'That is what they say,' continues Garasse,

'when anyone remonstrates with them. "Multi multa, varii varia," they make answer; and this particular thing happens to be my taste. Nature makes one man bigoted, and another superstitious—one hypochondriacal, and another sweat with fear. All these are afraid of their own shadow. As for me, I fear neither God nor devil: that is my destiny.'

To pick the grain of truth out of this heap of chaff became the object of more serious Libertines. All of them felt that the dead weight of custom must, at all costs, be shifted.

Es erben sich Gesetz' und Rechte
Wie eine ewige Krankheit fort—

and to make war on every sort and kind of established usage became the mission of Gabriel Naudé and La Mothe Le Vayer. Unlike the tormentors of Garasse, both of them were great scholars, and had all the angry contempt for their neighbours which scholarship not uncommonly engenders; for a man who spends his life in a study cannot help being more or less at odds with the petty conventions of society. It costs him great effort to conform to them—gossips noticed, for instance, that Le Vayer never managed to wear the same kind of boots as anyone else—and it is always irksome to fail in observing customs which one feels to be ridiculous. Montaigne would simply have shrugged his shoulders, but Le Vayer was not Montaigne. All his erudite pride rose in disgust at being expected to share the beliefs and habits of the common herd—wretched creatures, who knew no Greek. 'Pessimum argumentum turba,' he said, 'whether it wears silk or fustian, a cassock or a porter's apron.' But he was much too timid and too indifferent to pose as a reformer; though Naudé did good practical service in exposing the credulity of witches, and the still worse credulity of their judges. His was an instinctive antipathy to the supernatural as such. 'There were four things,' says Patin, 'which the late M. Naudé could not stand. And they were

visions and revelations, miracles and ghosts.' Having spent much of his life in Italy, he was always discoursing of that charmed country beyond the Alps, full of men who dug down into the secrets of nature so far as they could go, and refused to believe one syllable of anything else.

Le Vayer went less openly to work. Custom was his enemy—the custom he daily outraged in his boots—and on the authority of custom he waged an endless subterranean war. All the batteries of his learning were brought into play to show that on every conceivable point of religion, morality and usage, different peoples had followed precisely different rules. 'We kneel to pray; the Canadian Indians do not know what kneeling is. We admire a clean face more than a dirty; the Canadians think that nothing improves a face so much as smearing it with mud. We only make war in the day-time; the Massylians of Libya always fought at night, and made a truce in the day. The Cymbrians rejoiced to die on the battle-field, and thought it disgraceful to breathe their last in bed. The Greeks preferred to die at home, talking philosophy to the last.' Every now and then, however, the dreary catalogue is lightened by an almost Voltairean touch. 'Some writers say that hell simply means absence from God. Others—and these are right—say it means a blazing fire. The Chinese, in their heathen blindness, think that the fire is only smoky.'

Antitheses of this sort were the one weapon of his dialectic, and he applied them indiscriminately everywhere. His huge memory could always be trusted to turn a cold douche of facts on to the neatest argument. Even metaphors were not safe, as a ludicrous example from his 'Héxameron Rustique' shows. One of the company quoted from Balzac the remark that keeping up friendships by correspondence was like growing melons in Muscovy. Le Vayer frigidly replied that M. Balzac's efforts at alliteration were singularly ill chosen. Olearius' recent book of travels quite

agreed with Captain Margeret that the Russian climate was peculiarly suited to the growth of melons. Pascal may well have had some such scene in his mind when he wrote: 'There is no rule without an exception—no truth so certain, but it somewhere fails to apply. All we have got to do is to find the exception, and we shall either be very stupid or very unlucky if we do not manage to do so sooner or later.' Constant practice in this art turned Le Vayer into a 'Pyrrhonist,' or practical sceptic. A philosophical sceptic he cannot be called, if only because he refused to grapple with one serious philosophical problem in his life. His Pyrrhonism was not so much a doctrine as a state of mind; he himself defines it as *époque*—suspension of judgment. 'O precious *époque*,' he was always crying. 'O sweet and sure retreat of reason. O inestimable antidote to the false certainty of pedants. How great are thy uses in all affairs of life, and among all companies of men—commonly so much enamoured of their own opinion that they deny the name of common sense to any view that differs from theirs.'

Such an outburst characterises its author as a man of anæmic mental constitution over-ballasted by miscellaneous learning, and ill at ease in an age of dogmatists, all frenziedly anxious to draw conclusions. Conclusions were the last thing Le Vayer wished to have on his hands. He thought only in quotations; and, once an issue had been settled, what room would there be for more quotations? Besides, an unorthodox writer still ran considerable risks. Though the church-zealots could hardly burn his body, they were both willing and able to get the public executioner to burn his books. Still, in its own way Le Vayer's *époque* was an excellent discipline. There are few tasks at once more useful and more thankless than teaching caution to a dogmatist. Le Vayer's century might indeed have learnt a lesson from the Eastern sage he was so fond of quoting, who always explained at the end of a lecture: 'All I have

said is probably wrong.' But Le Vayer's own practice fell far below that of his Mahommedan model. Instead of trying, as Montaigne tried, to screw his countrymen down from the dogmatic level, he proposed a rival dogmatism of his own limited to one single article. *Époque* for its own sake became the one goal of human endeavour ; the wisest man was he who had most completely lost the power of making up his mind.

It would have gone ill with the Libertines had Le Vayer been their only leader. But behind him stood a far more remarkable writer : Pierre Charron, the priestly disciple of Montaigne. During the first half of the seventeenth century his ' Traité de la Sagesse ' became the Koran of Libertinism, even throwing Montaigne's own Essays into the shade. The reason is not far to seek. Montaigne was the most discursive of writers ; Charron's ' Traité ' is nothing if not exhaustively systematic. Pascal might find its endless divisions wearisome and depressing ; but most of his contemporaries were enraptured by a book which told them exactly what wisdom was, and how it could be reached. What, then, was Charron's recipe ? It was suggested by the circumstances of his time. Born in 1541, he was old enough to remember the omnivorous scholarship of the Renaissance, when men, by dint of reading everything there was to read, had read themselves out of the power of steering any definite course in life. Charron accordingly put small faith in books. ' Learning is a most excellent weapon, but not fit to be trusted in every hand. It makes sick minds giddy and conceited ; it perfects and polishes fools. A weak and injudicious man is oppressed by it, like a stomach over-charged with food.' Living through the Wars of Religion, Charron conceived undying hatred for the disputatious partisan. Le Vayer himself was not more bitter against ' men of presumptuous and pedantic temper, who prefer a hot-headed, peremptory opponent, with whom they

can argue; to a peaceable, sedate and modest man, who contents himself with doubting.' He doubts, because he will not put on the chains of a shibboleth. 'Instead of tying himself up to any opinion, he remains free, and at his own disposal. He examines and weighs all matters that come before him, putting the arguments into a balance, to see which scale preponderates.' Very soon he altogether forgets the trumpery squabbles of his neighbours. 'He casts his eyes, expands and stretches out his thoughts, over the vast universe. With Socrates, he becomes a citizen of the world; like the sun, he looks down with an equal, steady and indifferent eye upon the changes and vicissitudes here below. He keeps his will and affections disengaged, laying them out on very few objects, and those few such as justify his choice.'

But how does he learn to choose? May he follow wherever humour leads the way? By no means. 'Above all passions that of self-love, and inordinate fondness for our own imaginations and opinions, requires a watchful eye. We can never be in worse hands than our own. That prayer of the Spaniards is very significant: "O God, preserve me from myself."' How does God preserve us? Charron answers that He gives us a Law. 'The spring and source of wisdom is the Law of Nature, by which I mean universal equity and reason, the candle of our Maker lighted in every breast. This Law is born with, and bred in us; it is a piece of our frame and original constitution. Why, then, vain man, dost thou trouble to look abroad for a rule? To what purpose is all this tumbling over codes and institutes? The Two Tables of Moses, the Twelve Tables of Rome, the Law written in the hearts of those who have no law, all the good rules of equity that have anywhere been enacted, are but copies of that original which thou keepest close within thee.' Charron accordingly goes on to sing the praises of natural, as contrasted with positive law. It

is richer in content; 'latius officium quam juris patet regula.' It is always and everywhere one and the same, whereas systems of positive law vary from time to time, from place to place. 'Three degrees of longitude nullify a whole system of jurisprudence. A meridian decides on truth. A few years of prescription are enough to upset fundamental principles. Laws have their day, and the entry of Saturn into Leo marks the addition of a new crime to the statute-book. Quaint is the justice that a river bounds: what is true on one side of the Pyrenees spells error on the other.'[1]

Pascal was still more deeply pierced by another shaft from Charron's quiver. That positive laws habitually contradicted each other only laid at their door the sin of logical contradiction; that they were necessarily weaker and less effective than positive law was a far graver blot on their scutcheon. Charron goes on to explain that forcing wisdom down men's throats by means of laws and regulations is to 'graft in a fresh fruit on the crab-stock, to introduce a new, foreign and artificial virtue, such as will be at best but occasional and accidental only. It is beyond all doubt that natural excellences are more desirable than those that are studied and acquired. It is much more brave and great to act by the spontaneous motions of nature than with the most exquisite dexterity and nicest improvements of art; it is more divine to go forward in an easy, free, equal and uniform manner than with laborious efforts and uncertainty, with doubt, danger and perplexity of thought.' Nor did Charron scruple to apply this reasoning to religion. Churches were well enough for those who had it not in them to be wise.

> Wer Wissenschaft und Kunst besitzt
> Hat auch Religion.
> Wer diese beiden nicht besitzt,
> Der habe Religion.

Christianity was simply the alphabet of Wissenschaft

[1] Pascal, *Pens.* 294.

parcelled out into formal rules for the use of the unlearned; and Charron preaches reverence for its Founder along the lines of Coleridge's saying that St. Paul was the finest gentleman that ever lived. But of what use was a positive creed to the wise man? Dogmas and precepts, imposed from outside, could never compare with an inward Law that was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

To Gabriel Naudé and Gui Patin such teaching seemed 'divine.' But Libertines of laxer fibre were in great danger of fastening only on Charron's theological heterodoxy, and throwing his moral teaching to the winds. How make the Law of Nature attractive to average easy-going men? An answer was suggested by Gassendi, the philosophic Dean of Digne and apologist of Epicurus. Nowadays he is chiefly remembered for his scientific achievements, as the chief connecting-link between the atomism of ancient and modern times. Quite different services, however, endeared him to his Libertine contemporaries; it was thought that his ethical theories held a delicate balance between the conflicting claims of virtue and self-interest. The age had a strong belief in virtue for its own sake. So far from allowing that aims might be sought because they were pleasant, most moralists were inclined to argue that an action was right, just because it was hard or disagreeable. But this practical Stoicism only revolted the flippant type of Libertine youth; he answered that the presence of canting prigs like Seneca was quite enough of itself to account for all the wickedness of Imperial Rome. Now, however, stepped forward Gassendi to maintain that what was pleasant was not necessarily immoral. Happily for man, Nature had so appointed matters that what is good is generally agreeable, and what is agreeable is generally good. Hence the wise man does not separate morality from pleasure. Virtue is no more the sole object of his mental life than corn is of his bodily. But because he cannot live by bread alone, it

by no means follows that he can live without it. Virtue is as necessary to his happiness as vice is incompatible with it; that was what Epicurus meant, when he said that pleasure was health in the body and peace in the soul. Why, then, deny that pleasure is the end of life? It stands for a state of tranquil serenity, when soul and body have arrived at a thorough understanding of each other, when every passion has died down, and all inquietude is at rest. We shall best reach it if we 'follow Nature'—that is, if we obey our instinctive bent of character; we shall certainly miss it if we insist on struggling—'instar Sisyphi nixandi'—to turn ourselves into something other than Nature would have us be.

This doctrine many clever young men translated into their own language with full acknowledgments to the master. Still, it is easy to misunderstand the nature of their allegiance. They were not students, but men of the world; they did not go to Gassendi for a theory, so much as for the weight of his name. They wanted to be able to boast that he—whose speculative eminence neither schoolmen nor Cartesians could deny—was quite at one with themselves in throwing metaphysics aside as so much useless lumber. Whether they understood his real position may be doubted; for Gassendi was no sceptic, although it is true to say that he had read so much about the opinions of other philosophers that he found it exceedingly hard to reach coherent opinions of his own. Hence the point of the old saying that he much preferred an *esse videtur* to a *sufficit ut affirmem*. But this was quite enough for his disciples; all of them felt towards him as did Saint Évremond after a first youthful interview. Gassendi told him that to discover what great men had thought about a subject was feasible enough, but to decide which of them was right was a hard task indeed. Nature had put such jealous limits to our knowledge, at the same time as she endowed

us with a boundless curiosity. Saint Évremond came away convinced that Gassendi was at once the most enlightened and the least presumptuous of philosophers; but this one interview was enough to cure him of all attachment to philosophy itself. 'I was already very doubtful of its value. Now I finally made up my mind against it, and began to wonder how a sensible man could waste his time over such futilities.'

Even without Gassendi, however, abstractions and Saint Évremond would soon have parted company. Patin, Le Vayer and their friends still remained within the logical orbit, even when their chief occupation was making war on logic. All of them came of the professional class—the class that had invented the geometrical spirit, and lived behind a barricade of arguments and quotations. Even the tormentors of Garasse paraded their tags from Plato and Aristotle, not to speak of Hermes Trismegistus. But Saint Évremond belonged to a world where intellectual problems were disposed of much more lightly. There argument was little short of a breach of good manners; while as to quotations, he would as soon have cited Trismegistus as have gone to make unseemly noises during Garasse's sermons. He was a fine gentleman with a ready pen and a very independent mind—an idealised Méré—in fact, all the Chevalier wished to be, and much more besides. He owes his place among the Libertines to his worldly wisdom. Owning no standard but good taste, he applied it resolutely everywhere, to literature, to morals, even to religion. Little of his time was wasted over points of etiquette. Méré might pride himself on being an excellent workman of good breeding; Saint Évremond had no need to work. A special friend of Condé and La Rochefoucauld, he knew that he already possessed whatever birth and breeding could give. Had anyone challenged his right to speak on any subject he chose, he might have answered by adapting a

famous phrase of St. Augustine: *Habeo urbanitatem, et facio quod volo.*

Nor was this mere aristocratic impertinence. Brought up outside the pedantry of courts and schools, Saint Évremond had a masculine contempt for rules grounded simply on tradition. 'What right,' he asks, 'has any art or science to set itself up above common sense?' A great traveller, he suspected that mental insularity went for much in the upkeep of these sacred rules. He was always denouncing the peculiar incapacity of his nation to approach things from any but a French point of view. 'When in another country,' he said, 'we even call the natives foreigners, because their habits are not just the same as ours.' At home in several literatures he saw much more clearly than the erudite Boileau how surely the soundest rules obey a universal law of change and decay. 'The genius of our time,' he says, speaking of the gods of Homer, 'is quite against these fables and false mysteries. We are all for positive truths. Common sense keeps fancy in check, and nothing short of solid reason passes muster to-day. Neither taste nor knowledge are what they were. Once the sky was tenanted by deities innumerable; now it is simply a huge, watery space. The same sun continues to shine, but he no longer sinks to rest in the sea; he goes on to illumine another world. All has changed—God and Nature, governments and customs, tastes and morals.'

Already Le Vayer had said the same thing, but said it the wrong way. He had only made war on the particular opinions; whereas the enemy of Saint Évremond was the temper of mind that called them forth. A great student of Montaigne—'one of the few books one goes back to more and more, as one grows older and more natural'—he had caught the Essayist's feeling that the less pretence a doctrine made, the more likely was it to be true; since none but dubious propositions would take the trouble to palm

themselves off as certain. Not that he openly applied this reasoning to religion. So far from wishing to attack it, he posed as an amateur ecclesiastical reformer, sincerely anxious to reform Catholicism in the direction of sweetness and light. Religious women of the world came in for his highest praise; whereas he was never tired of gibing at theologians and devotees—wretched creatures, whose convulsive antics parodied the creed they meant to serve. For the theologians were intolerant, and a genuine hatred of intolerance is among Saint Évremond's highest traits. Why should I persecute a man, he is fond of asking, because I disapprove of his opinions? Everyone would pity him if he were blind. Why, then, ill-treat him because the blindness is in his mind? Besides, what is the good of persecution? Faith does not wait on our beck and call. Even orthodox Catholics do not always possess it. 'With most of them the wish to believe takes the place of actual belief. Their will assents to what their intellect denies. I have even known pious people, whose heart loved God as sincerely as their reason disbelieved in Him.'

Intolerance, however, was not the only sin of dogmatism in Saint Évremond's eyes. Still more pronouncedly than Méré, he held that social intercourse was the chief end of life; all our ideas and interests should lead up to the supreme art of conversation. But in society a man of strong opinions is apt to be both offensive and absurd. Even if he is too well-bred to inflict his shibboleths on his neighbours, they bulk too largely in his mind. He becomes unduly self-absorbed; and Saint Évremond held that it is ridiculous to 'talk too much about oneself, even to oneself.' All sense of proportion disappears. A man grows increasingly satisfied with himself and his own ideas; or else he sets out on the opposite tack, becomes morbidly despondent, and is for ever discovering blemishes in his own character. Dissatisfied with what he is, he strains

feverishly to turn himself into something else. Nature meant the critic Chapelain to write honest, wholesome prose. Instead, he must needs set up as a bombastic poet. 'La prose est trop facile,' Saint Évremond makes him say,

> et son bas naturel
> N'a rien qui puisse rendre un auteur immortel ;
> Mais d'un sens figuré la noble allégorie
> Des sublimes esprits sera toujours chérie.
> Je quitte donc la prose et la simple nature
> Pour composer des vers, où règne la figure.

What Chapelain did with epic poetry, that Mme. de Sablé did with love. She also must improve on nature, and freeze one of the simplest of emotions into a complex intellectual process. No doubt, all she was aiming at was to free love from sensuality, and for that Saint Évremond gave her due credit. Unfortunately she did not see that she erred as much in one direction as Des Barreaux did in another. True love had as little to do with pure reason as with the grosser appetites ; to bind it to obey all the vagaries of Madeleine de Scudéry and her Carte du Tendre was simply flying in the face of Nature. Still, there were worse offenders than the *précieuses*. Much as Saint Évremond respected religious women of the world, he was remorseless towards *dévotes*. For their edification he sketched his portrait of the ideal woman, 'la femme qui ne se trouve point, et ne se trouvera jamais.' She is pious, but neither melancholy nor superstitious, and quite free from the supernatural silliness of seeing the Hand of God in trivial everyday events. She does not believe that the best place to find Him is a gloomy solitude. She thinks that to break away from human intercourse—from all our dearest and most natural ties—is the mark of a selfish and disordered fancy. She seeks Him in the world of men, where His Bounty is most openly displayed, and His Providence finds its worthiest employment.

In short, Chapelain, Mme. de Sablé, and the *dévotes*

all sinned the same sin. All three insisted on picking out for themselves a path other than Nature had intended for them. All three fell under the condemnation of Pierre Charron: 'Aller contre son naturel, c'est tenter Dieu.' But why is it tempting God? Saint Évremond answers that, whether we like it or no, happiness must be our end in life; and happiness means a gradual adjustment of our appetites to our affections, of our affections to our reason. Until equilibrium is established, life will be a struggle; once perfect harmony reigns, man has reached his goal. But to set up 'unnatural' ideals is to prolong the conflict for ever, and put happiness altogether beyond our reach. That is why Saint Évremond was always exalting the 'wisdom' of Epicurus above the 'virtue' of the Stoics. 'A virtuous life is seldom free from pain, owing to the endless war waged between duty and inclination. Now we put up with what we dislike, now we deny ourselves what we should have liked. We must use force with ourselves to carry out nearly everything we do, and to refrain from doing nearly all we leave undone. But the life of wisdom is moderate and peaceful. Where virtue is fighting enemies, wisdom is gently guiding subjects.'

Whether Pascal ever met in the flesh the writer of these lines is a question neither answerable nor important; for Saint Évremond only set down in print ideas that had long been flitting through the mind of Miton, and many another worldling of the age. How important Pascal thought them may be judged from the degree of energy that he brought to their refutation. But, in refuting them, he borrowed more than one page from the Libertine book. 'Aller contre son naturel, c'est tenter Dieu' might serve as the motto of the 'Pensées,' quite as well as the 'Essays' of Montaigne. Pascal did not quarrel with the Libertines because they followed Nature too closely, but because they did not follow her closely enough. They

went as much too far in one direction as the 'Sainte Philosophie' had gone in the other. Du Vair professed to 'found on man the greatness of man' by dwelling only on his nobler qualities; Montaigne founded the science of his littleness by paying an exclusive attention to his weaknesses and vices. Pascal answers that real human nature is neither purely great, nor purely small; she is 'a Sphinx, a monstrous contradiction, alike the glory and the scandal of the Universe.' And he will go on to claim that this contradiction can only be reconciled by religion. Alone among teachers, the Bible has dared to look the Sphinx full in the face, and deal with her as she really is.

CHAPTER XI

THE SECOND CONVERSION

Ever since he first turned his attention to the vacuum, zealous Cartesians had seen in Pascal a brilliant future recruit to their ranks. And for a while there seemed good likelihood that their expectation would be fulfilled. The salons and the Libertines had by no means banished hydrostatics from his head. All through 1653 he was intermittently busy over questions connected with the vacuum; and in the beginning of 1654 he laid before the Paris Club a whole crop of mathematical pamphlets, together with a programme of yet more elaborate researches into the Arithmetical Triangle and the Theory of Number. For he still remained a member of the Club, although its character had greatly changed since the death of Mersenne—murdered by a clumsy phlebotomist in the autumn of 1648. Although Descartes followed him to the grave within two years, the Club had become little more than a forcing-house of Cartesian ideas. With the scientific side of this new departure Pascal felt little sympathy; his 1654 programme was meant to recall it to earlier and better ways. But for the moment he was bitten by its metaphysical speculations; indeed, his indiscreet readiness to allude to these in general company brought down on his head some very plain speaking from Méré about 'that Descartes, of whom you think so much.' What really attracted him, however, was the religious side of the matter. He had broken away from Port Royal, because the geometrical spirit within him could not away

with its cloudy intuitions; and Cartesianism had come forward to offer a feather-bed for a falling Jansenist. For Descartes had undertaken to reconcile theology and common sense. He offered the world what the world had never seen before—proofs of God, freedom, and immortality, put into language strictly reasoned, but not too hard for average minds to follow. And average minds responded to his call. Down to quite modern times, Descartes set the standard of many a French layman's faith; and perhaps even Bossuet and Bourdaloue would not have shown such masculine confidence in reason, had they not felt that the greatest intellectual force of the age was on their side. The charm of this assurance even Pascal felt. From the Jansenist God, who admittedly could not be proved by argument, it was pleasant to turn to the Cartesian God, who admittedly could. Come what might, He could not escape one, since His existence was guaranteed by chains of irrefragable logic.

Still, there was another side to the picture, as Pascal presently found out. Descartes liked to be thought—and in his own way, sincerely was—an upholder of religion; but he was careful to avoid all dealings with theology, as such. He kept strictly within his own domain—the reason of 'men who were simply men.' From this benevolent neutrality he only emerged in order to defend such truths as happened to be necessary alike to metaphysics and religion. Thus his whole system crumbled to pieces, unless he could prove the existence of God. Without Him, the truths of science had no warrant, and motion no First Cause. Freedom resulted from the fact that reason can always master passion, 'if art and industry be used.' Immortality followed on his demonstration that mind is immaterial; why should a bodiless thing be subject to laws of change and decay? These three things once proved, however, Descartes made his bow and departed, leaving the field clear for theology.

What God was like he did not pretend to say, nor how eternal happiness could be compassed, or human happiness be used. Such things were matters of faith, not reason; and he only dealt with the domain where faith and reason overlapped. Clearly this division of labour must soon break down in practice. Men may follow reason, or they may follow faith, but very few minds are capable of following both at once. Most Cartesian imaginations fastened on the God of reason, and troubled the God of faith but little. What were truths confessedly above proof, in comparison with other truths which their own efforts had successfully proved? Besides, there was another rock ahead. What was to be made of regions wherein both faith and reason claimed an interest? To which did morality belong? Descartes began by handing it over altogether to the Church. But as his knowledge grew, he saw himself forced—much, it would seem, to his own disgust—to sketch out the lines of a purely rational morality based on psychology and medicine. How it could be harmonised with the rival code of Christian ethics the timid philosopher did not explain. He was only too glad to leave his two Camarinas side by side—never opposed, but never combined. On this only one result could follow. As science grew increasingly sure of itself, the boundaries of the supernatural world retreated backwards, until the eighteenth century suppressed it altogether as dangerous and useless.

Such a theory was not likely to keep Pascal captive long. He might play with Cartesianism for the moment; but in due time his grim humour was sure to be excited at the sight of his Maker literally made into a God from the machine—brought on to the stage simply to be the cause of motion, in order that one kick from Him might send the world spinning on its axis. Descartes' abstruser proofs of God Pascal handled with a little more respect. They might be useful to some people; though he doubted whether

many could understand them, or whether they made a lasting impression on those few. 'A man may believe the proportions of numbers to be eternal and immaterial truths, all dependent on a First Truth called God. But for all that, he need not be advanced one step along the high-road of salvation.'[1] Nor was their spiritual ineffectiveness the only blemish in the Cartesian proofs. The more he turned them over in his mind, the more sceptical did Pascal grow of their logical validity. Early in his friendship with Miton, he was set down to a study of Montaigne; and although he did not grasp at once the full import of the 'Essays,' he soon found that they threw a light uncomfortably new on the limits of man's reasoning powers. He has himself described their first effect upon him in an interview with the Jansenist priest, Lemaistre de Saci, some little while after his second conversion.

> 'Montaigne's plan is to treat everything as doubtful —so much so, that he even doubts if he doubts. Of this also he is doubtful; and so his indecision rolls on in a circle without end. He is quite as much against those who say there is no certainty as those who say there is; for what he calls his master-principle is to be sure of nothing, and remain in an ignorance that ignores itself. It cannot be put into positive language; for owning that he doubted would betray him into a positive statement, and that is just what he will not make. So, instead of saying *I do not know*, he takes as his motto the interrogation: *What do I know?* Over this he puts a pair of scales, to show that the arguments on either side of a question exactly balance each other. In short, he is a thorough Pyrrhonist. This is the whole burden of his "Essays," and the one thing he tries to establish, although he does not always show his hand. But imperceptibly he pulls down all that men hold for

[1] *Pens.* 556.

best-assured. Not that he wants to prove the contrary—for certitude is his one enemy—so much as to show that the objections to any opinion are just as strong as the arguments in its favour. Hence a man cannot afford to make up his mind.'

'From this standpoint he makes game of all received opinions. He laughs at those who try to stem the tide of law-suits in France by multiplying laws—as though statutes could root out the doubts out of which law-suits grow, or could raise a dyke against uncertainty, and keep conjecture under lock and key. He says he would rather have his case tried by the first bystander than by judges armed with all these ordinances. Not that he really wishes to tamper with our institutions. He is not so ambitious; besides, in a world where all opinions are wrong, his own is no better than that of anyone else. What he wants to show is the fallacy of the belief that increasing laws diminishes law-suits. On the contrary, it increases their number. Difficulties grow, the more we explain them; and the chief use of commentaries is to darken texts. That is why we should trust to our first impression of a book; the moment we look into it a little more closely, all its clearness disappears.'[1]

Paradoxical as all this seemed—more especially to the son of a much-respected judge—Pascal could not but recognise its connexion with all he had learnt from Miton and Méré. Ever since their friendship began, he had seen the geometrical spirit ignominiously driven from one field after another; and now he was scarcely surprised to find Montaigne calmly taking for granted that it was always and everywhere a broken reed. But how did all this react on Descartes? What were his principles but the fine flower of the geometrical spirit? With it they stood or fell. Most clearly was this the case with the side of Cartesianism

[1] *Entretien avec M. de Saci*, *Works*, ii. pp. 7, 8.

that chiefly interested Pascal. Descartes had undertaken to prove the existence of God by reason alone, without the least help from faith; Montaigne devoted the longest chapter of his book to making merry over those who discussed their Maker in the light of unassisted argument.

> 'He asks them how they manage to judge One who is necessarily infinite. He asks them if they understand what their soul is, and whether it can know itself or anything else. He asks them for a definition of time, space, motion, unity—all things quite close to us, and yet entirely beyond our grasp. He prays them to tell him what they mean by health, sickness, life, death, good, evil, justice, sin—words we have every moment on our lips. He asks them if the notions we call first principles or axioms are agreed upon by all men, and in harmony with ultimate truth. And since we only know by faith that they were implanted in our minds by a Being supremely good, he asks how men who put aside the help of faith can possibly be sure that they did not spring up by chance. They make common sense their standard of truth, but how do they know that it speaks truly? How can they talk about standards at all, when they do not know what truth is? Thus does he show that God and truth are inseparable ideas, and that the one stands or falls with the other.'
>
> 'Next he goes through the sciences one by one. He shows how doubtful are the axioms of geometry, and the terms it cannot define—space, motion, and the like. Physics fare still worse at his hands, and medicine worst of all. Then comes the turn of history, ethics, politics, jurisprudence and the rest. Altogether he proves that we come no nearer truth than we should do if our life were one long dream, from which we only woke at death. Thus cruelly does he flout and jeer at reason unprotected by faith. It has climbed

up high ; he pulls it down, makes it doubt whether it is reasonable, and thinks himself merciful when he leaves it on a level with the beasts. If it grumbles, he threatens to degrade it lower still. There he keeps it prisoner, until it has learnt from God Himself what its true station is.' [1]

This sudden attack on reason has startled many critics. How could a heaven-born mathematician agree with the wholly ungeometrical Montaigne in calling mathematics doubtful? But Pascal was genuinely staggered by the aspersions cast on Euclid in the 'Essays'; and his *humeur bouillante* could not allow him to stop and look too closely into their value. He was a man of impulses—of one impulse at one moment—and he seldom changed his mind without making a veritable holocaust of all he had previously adored. Besides, mathematics altogether held a very small place in his mind, as compared with the metaphysics of Descartes. The wrong-doers he could never forgive were those who had made a fool of him, if only for a moment; and that the Cartesians had certainly done, when they induced him to believe in their 'geometrical God.' How, then, could he better turn the tables on them than by showing that their methods made both God and geometry appear uncertain? Nor was this simply a grim jest. Montaigne had thrown some very startling light on the validity of axioms. He had proved that reason cannot attain to God, and that men would be much worse off if it could. For what reason gives, it can also take away. If my faith in God depends on argument, there is always danger that I may change my mind, or fall in with an unbeliever who happens to be a better debater than myself. Very soon the God of Reason appeared to Pascal no better than an idol, fit only to be torn in pieces by Montaigne, the 'minister of a great vengeance,' who had hoisted reason with its own petard.

[1] *Entretien*, *Works*, ii. pp. 9, 10.

Thus did the 'Essays' lead their critic from Descartes back to Jansen. Reason had once made him prefer the metaphysical to the mystical God; now, on the collapse of reason, he returned to the mysticism of Port Royal. Towards the third alternative he felt apparently no temptation. Many and bitter are the reproaches addressed to himself at the second conversion, but that of 'infidelity' is not among them. What he laments is having adopted the geometrical Deity of the philosophers; and even Pascal would scarcely have said that to believe in the Cartesian God was worse than believing in no God at all. Not but what he always drew a marked distinction between the two kinds of misbelievers. For his former fellow-culprits, the Cartesian rationalists, nothing is too bad; whereas the anger dies out of his voice so soon as he turns to the sceptics. Libertine indifference to the great problems of religion might be 'fantastic,' 'brutal,' even 'sottish'; but Pascal always treats it with a sympathy which he is far from showing towards the 'demi-savants,' or Cartesian prigs. He could not forget that Libertine hands had delivered him from this same priggishness. From Méré and Miton he had learnt that the geometrical spirit goes for little in a drawing-room; now came Montaigne to teach him that it goes for no more in religion.

As with religion, so with ethics. No amount of ingrained Puritan severity could keep Pascal from highly relishing the gibes Montaigne flung at the austere figure of natural morality.

> 'His plan is to treat everything but Faith as doubtful; the more men seek for truth and goodness, the less is their peace of mind. They had much better give up the search, and skate lightly over problems; the ice is sure to break if they bear too hardly on it. They pick up a lump; it melts, and runs away through their fingers, leaving emptiness behind. That is why

Montaigne accepts the evidence of his senses. It would cost him something not to do so; and why should he make the effort when he has not the least notion where truth lies? In the same way he flies from pain and death, although he is far from sure that they are genuine evils. Nature tells him that they are; but how can he afford to trust her, when so many of her pleasantest instincts turn out to be crimes? Thus there is nothing odd about him; he behaves like everyone else. Only he does not think, like the simpletons, that what he does is just and right; what he says is that, reason being dumb, custom has a right to be heard. He gets up on horseback, like the least philosophical of mortals, because the horse allows him to do so; although, for anything he can tell, the animal may have a better right to make use of him. He avoids certain vices, and even keeps his marriage-vow, because indulgence is followed by trouble. Perhaps this means more loss than gain, but that is no affair of his, who only seeks tranquillity. He flies from the lone rock where sits the nymph of Stoic virtue in a cramped, uneasy posture, with beaded brow and hair on end and glaring eye, in a gloomy silence far from men. His own nymph is an easy, cheerful, unassuming madcap. Hither and thither she strays just as the fancy takes her, drawing food for merriment alike from pleasure and from pain. From the lap of her luxurious ease she indolently beckons to man to show him that here alone is rest—here are ignorance and indifference, the two downiest of pillows for a well-formed head.'[1]

Much as he enjoyed discoursing about these theories of Montaigne, Pascal felt small inclination to adopt them. No doubt, much of what the Essayist said was true, and

[1] *Entretien*, *Works*, ii. pp. 11, 12.

he certainly provided a drastic antidote to the geometrical spirit; but to take him literally would mean despair of human nature, and a lapse into the 'lowest cowardice.' But the 'Essays' only despaired of man because they misinterpreted him. From the undoubted fact that most of our speculations are futile, and most of our moral efforts ill-directed, Montaigne had calmly gone on to conclude that both these activities were 'unnatural'; the less we thought, and the less we strove, the better and happier should we be. Pascal answered that both activities are forced upon us by the conditions of our state. We must keep on struggling. 'Despite all the miseries that surround us, and take us by the throat, we cannot get rid of an instinct that still buoys us up.' [1] We must keep on asking questions, however unlikely we may think it that those questions will be answered. 'I am struck with awe, when I call to mind the short space of my life, hemmed in between two portions of eternity. The little room I fill and see is lost in an infinity of space I cannot fathom, and that knows me not. Why should I be here instead of there—alive to-day, and not to-morrow? Who put me here? Who allotted this particular time and space to me?' [2]

One speculative question, however, overtopped all the rest. Was there, or was there not, a life beyond the grave? On no point did Pascal find it harder to wring a definite opinion from the disciples of Montaigne. Miton is said to have written an essay in defence of immortality, which he passed round with the private explanation that he was really on the other side. And not a few heroes of the Fronde went into battle with the lines of Cyrano on their lips:

> Une heure après notre mort notre âme évanouie
> Sera ce qu'elle a été une heure avant notre vie.

Not that these Libertines were militant free-thinkers of the

[1] *Pens.* 411. [2] *Pens.* 205, 208.

modern type. They were willing enough to believe in God *sous bénéfice d'inventaire*—as a spiteful critic once said of Miton—so long as they found it paid. Most of them thought it likely enough that a realm of faith existed, though they were frankly uninterested in its contents. Appeals to it they regarded much as the Courts regard a suitor who sets up the Gaming Act; they do not think the better of him, but they fully recognise that he is within his legal rights. In short, Libertinism held it ill-bred to attack religion, weak-minded to think much about it. 'The death-bed of Petronius,' wrote Saint Évremond, characteristically, 'was the finest of antiquity. Cato showed resentment, even rage. Socrates died like a wise man, except that he was too anxious to know what fate awaited him in the next world, and had endless discussions on the subject with his friends in the prison. Altogether, death bulked large in his eyes. Petronius alone took leave of life with an exquisite indifference. No philosophic treatises were read to him, only the lightest verse. Not a syllable, not a gesture, betrayed the agony of a dying man. He simply ceased to be, and the VIXIT of the Romans applied most properly to him.'

These were brave words; but a short experience of Libertines showed Pascal that they found the *Homo liber de nulla re minus quam de morte cogitat* easier to formulate than to practise. Death was one of the few subjects that startled Saint Évremond out of his self-possession. He thought all reference to the subject indelicate in the last degree; indeed, he could not bear to see a widow on the stage, because her black dress called up memories of funerals and their 'lugubrious rites.' Pascal struck a tender chord in the hearts of his Libertine friends when he wrote: 'It is quaint of us to find comfort in the society of our fellows. They are as miserable as we: what is their help worth? We shall die alone. . . . The last act is tragic, however

fine the rest of the comedy may be. They rattle down the earth on our head, and there is an end of us for ever.' [1]

Once these thoughts began crowding into Pascal's mind, a definite breach with the Libertines was only a question of time. Montaigne had converted him from the geometrical spirit to 'Nature'; but the nature that appealed to him was very far from being the cheerful, unassuming madcap of the 'Essays.' At first, when everything was new, he had been delighted by the drawing-rooms; but now he had learnt all they could teach the enjoyment quickly palled. As he afterwards confessed to his sister, ever since the autumn of 1653 he had felt an unconquerable loathing for the world and its inhabitants. From fashion he fled back to science. The greater part of 1654 was taken up by a feverish mathematical activity; indeed, he was corresponding with Fermat almost up to the moment of conversion. But Méré and Montaigne had done their work too well; science could no longer content him. Besides, a 'continual scruple' was gnawing at his conscience: what were mathematics in comparison with eternity? 'When God deigns to speak to sinners,' Pascal wrote in a little tract on conversion, avowedly based on his own experience, 'His first step is to raise their soul on to a higher plane whence their nature and surroundings appear in a wholly new perspective. They see that perishable things are perishing, nay, already perished. Every moment snatches some enjoyment from their hand. All they held dearest slips away, as they hasten on towards a day when they will be stripped for ever of the vain and fleeting treasures wherein they put their trust. Alone and forsaken stands their soul, because it would not turn to the one Good that endures unchanged through this life and the next.' [2]

Followed an effort to seek that Good, but the chains of habit were not lightly broken. To detest and denounce

[1] *Pens.* 210, 211.
[2] *Sur la Conversion du Pécheur*, *Works*, ii. pp. 37–8.

one's surroundings is one thing; actually to break loose from them is quite another. 'Religious exercises,' continues the tract, 'seem even more distasteful than the vanities of the world, since visible things have greater purchase on us than the mere hope of invisible; although the reality of invisible things is more attractive than the vanity of visible. Thus our heart is torn in half between what is real but absent, and what is present but vain; and thereon follows confusion and disorder.'[1] From this confusion there seemed no escape, until, one September day in 1654, Pascal bethought himself of his sister Jacqueline, and set off post-haste for Port Royal. It was not his first visit, though his previous errands had chiefly been on the disagreeable subject of Jacqueline's 'dowry.' Now, however, he appeared in a very different spirit. 'It grieved me much to see how wretched he was,' wrote Jacqueline to Gilberte Périer. 'He told me how he longed to be free of all his occupations, and to cut adrift from the world. Between his detestation of its follies and the reproaches of his conscience, he feels very much more detached from it than ever he was before. On the other hand, he feels himself wholly forsaken by the grace of God. He has striven hard to regain it, although all the while he felt that the impulse to do so came from his own heart and conscience, and not from Above. This confession was a great surprise to me, and an even greater pleasure; I was filled with hopes I never dared have before. But it would take pages to describe all that passed between us. After that day he came so often as scarcely to leave me a moment for myself, though all I did was to listen, without trying to put any kind of pressure on him.'[2]

Pressure, however, was not needed; for Pascal stood on the threshold of conversion, if by conversion be understood the restoration of equilibrium to a mind hitherto unbalanced.

[1] *Sur la Conversion du Pécheur, Works*, ii. pp. 37–8.
[2] Letter of 25th January, 1655 (L. O. M. p. 356).

There is nothing mysterious about it. It may be expressed in terms of physiology, and Pascal himself would not have objected to have it so explained, so long as physiology added that the last term in the series was the grace of God, adapting itself to the natural workings of the human machine. Pascal's mind was powerless to decide between 'things visible, but vain, and things invisible, but real'; but, fortunately for such natures as his, the whole of our mental life is not summed up in conscious thought. Beneath lie dim subliminal activities, whose existence it is as hard to deny as it is to explain their nature; though anyone, who has known a problem work itself out in his mind by a process seemingly spontaneous, has had experience of their operations. Conversion is this spontaneous process on an extended scale. The conscious Pascal could not decide between things visible and things invisible; the unconscious forces in his brain took the matter into their own hands, and deftly and silently worked him out an answer. Nor was that answer necessarily hysterical or mad, because it entered Pascal's consciousness full-grown in the flash of a single moment. After his death a slip of parchment was discovered sewn up in the lining of his coat, and bearing the following inscription:—

In the year of Grace, 1654.
On Monday, 23rd of November, Feast of St. Clement, Pope and Martyr, and of other Saints in the Martyrology.
Vigil of St. Chrysogonus, Martyr, and others.
Between about half-past ten in the evening until half-past twelve.

Fire.

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob.
Not the God of the philosophers and the wise.
Certainty, certainty.
God of Jesus Christ.
'My God and thy God.'
'Thy God shall be my God.'
Forgetfulness of the world, and all but God.
He is found only in the ways shown by the Gospel.
Greatness of the soul of man.
'O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee.'

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.
I have fallen away from Him.
'They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters.'
'My God, forsakest Thou me?'
May I not fall from Him for ever.
'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent.'
Jesus Christ.
Jesus Christ.
I have fallen away; I have fled from Him, denied Him, crucified Him.
May I not fall from Him for ever.
We keep hold of Him only in the way shown by the Gospel.
How sweet is utter renunciation.
Absolute submission to Jesus Christ and my Redeemer.
'I will not forget thy word.' Amen.

Such a text requires no commentary; and a biographer had best imitate the reticence of Pascal, who never breathed a word of his experience, not even to his sister. Nor did Jacqueline notice any striking change. Although the battle was really decided on that November night, it was not till some two months later that she dared to write to Gilberte Périer, to announce the conversion as an accomplished fact. 'He has grown in grace, till you would scarcely know him. He is become humble and submissive; he despises and distrusts himself, and would fain know that his name was blotted out from the memory of man.'

One sentence in his manuscript—'Absolute submission to Jesus Christ and to my Director'—certainly sticks in a Protestant gorge. But a man who has only regained his equilibrium at the price of a violent spiritual crisis must feel the need of an external prop—at any rate, for a while; and it was chiefly during the first few weeks that the Jansenist director's hand weighed heavily. A sinner of to-day, said Saint Cyran, must not look for milder treatment than St. Paul—'directed,' immediately after his conversion, by Ananias at Damascus. Besides, the promise did not uproot certain 'relics of independence' in Pascal's mind.

He could not fall in with Jacqueline's proposal that he should take Singlin—the old confessor-in-chief at Port Royal—as his guide; and indeed Singlin himself, who was neither learned nor experienced in the world, shrank from undertaking so redoubtable a penitent. Eventually the matter was compromised, and Pascal passed into the hands of a younger priest, Isaac de Saci, with whom he presently had the discussion on Epictetus and Montaigne. Jacqueline was more distressed about another relic of independence. 'He is strangely anxious that nobody should know he comes here to see anyone but me,' wrote the sister to Gilberte Périer. 'But he says he could easily make the excuse of having business in the country. He would leave his carriage and servants at some village near Port Royal, and go the rest of the way on foot. Then, if he gave a false name at the door, no one but M. Singlin need know who he really was.' [1] But Pascal was not afraid of the world in the crude way his sister imagined; she herself noticed how little he cared for the romances that gossip promptly invented about him. But to face his old friends was a different matter, for it was only too easy to guess what they would think about his conduct. Dare he seriously tell Miton and Méré that they were wrong, and worthy old clergymen like Singlin right? He knew that, so far from converting them to his thesis, he would only awaken their disgust. Again, why should he set up to have higher standards than his neighbours? Was he so much better than they? But presently he came to see that the reason which made a Christian aim higher than his fellows was 'a holy humility, which God raises far above pride.'

These, and other like perplexities made it desirable that he should retire into solitude for a while, until his mind was grown better accustomed to his new way of life. On the morrow of the Three Kings (January 7, 1655) Jacqueline

[1] L. O. M. p. 360.

records his arrival at Vaumurier, a country-house belonging to the Duke of Luynes, the great patron of Port Royal, and within a stone's throw of the abbey. After a few days he passed on to Port Royal itself. Thenceforward, although he was never officially enrolled in their community, a great part of his time was spent among the Port Royal 'hermits'—a group of laymen, who led an austere, semi-monastic existence at the abbey-gates. 'Here,' wrote Jacqueline, 'he says that he is treated like a prince—a prince in St. Bernard's sense of the word—for he can be alone as much as he likes, and practise poverty so far as discretion allows. He manages to be at all the Offices, from Prime down to Compline, nor does it hurt him to get up at five o'clock in the morning.'[1] Indeed, his cheerfulness surprised Jacqueline herself, and she was curious to know what M. de Saci thought of a penitent in such high spirits—spirits all the more startling, since he was threatened with a new attack of his neurasthenic disorder soon after his conversion. But the illness came to nothing; Jacqueline was able to boast that, even for the body, Jesus Christ was a better physician than Hippocrates.[2]

This sentence sums up the moral effects of the second conversion. It is a waste of time to speculate, as was formerly the custom, on whether it would have been better for Pascal, if he had not been converted at all, but remained true to the science of his youth. All the evidence goes to prove that science would not have contented him for ever. 'In times of affliction,' he afterwards wrote, 'knowledge of the natural world would never console me for ignorance of the moral, whereas knowledge of the moral would always console me for ignorance of the natural.' But knowledge of the moral world only comes to such natures as his at the price of a spiritual convulsion. That over, he could settle down to his real business in life.

[1] L. O. M. p. 361.
[2] Letter of Jacqueline to her brother, January 19, 1655 (L. O. M. p. 355).

CHAPTER XII

PORT ROYAL

Port Royal des Champs was a convent of Cistercian nuns standing in what that unromantic age called a 'horrible desert'—that is, a thickly wooded, swampy valley about fifteen miles south-west of Paris. There Angélique Arnauld began her reign as abbess; though in 1626 malaria drove her and her nuns to the capital, and Port Royal de Paris became their abode. Twenty years later, however, some of the nuns returned to the forsaken abbey; in the meantime its grounds had been occupied by Pascal's new associates, the 'solitaries,' or hermits. These were a number of celibate laymen, who lived like monks of the strictest observance, although they took no vow. The first settler was a nephew of Angélique, Antoine Lemaistre, a brilliant young barrister of thirty, on whom the attorneys were already showering briefs. But the Arnauld blood ran hot in his veins; he could not remain for ever content with merely legal triumphs. In 1637 he told the Lord Chancellor that he meant to retire from the world. His withdrawal was very variously judged. The Jesuit Rapin frankly admits that nothing brought more credit to Port Royal than the lifelong adherence of this 'most distinguished young man.' But the Chancellor was much annoyed, for he had got Lemaistre's name down on his list for speedy promotion to the Bench. And a Protestant chronicler feels drawn towards that unnamed 'good monk from the country,'

who wrote to point out that conversion by no means necessarily entails a breach of ties already knit; since temporal business, rightly regarded, is only the reverse side of spiritual. Lemaistre, however, had his answer ready. The world might be well enough for those who had kept their robe without a stain: for a sinner like himself it was no place.

Accordingly he settled down in a little hermitage near Port Royal. There he was presently joined by his brother, Isaac Lemaistre de Saci, who afterwards took holy orders, and became confessor to the hermits; in that capacity he held with Pascal the celebrated discussion on Epictetus and Montaigne. Next came their cousin, young Arnauld de Luzanci, son of Angélique's eldest brother, Robert Arnauld d'Andilly. Before long, the father followed his son; and by the time of Pascal's appearance the number of hermits had risen to some twenty-five. Several were old soldiers, others were priests, who had taken holy orders with insufficient signs of a vocation, and now found themselves unworthy of the altar. Behind these came a crowd of young men drawn from various strata of the legal class—Thomas du Fossé, Claude Lancelot, the secretary and biographer of Saint Cyran, Tillemont, the ecclesiastical historian, and Pierre Fontaine, the Boswell of Port Royal. With these ranks Mme. de Sévigné's favourite writer, Pierre Nicole; a layman profoundly read in theology, and the most human of all Jansenists, he formed an invaluable link between Port Royal and the world. Then there was Hamon the physician, and Moreau the surgeon. Two or three Catholic recusants from our own country swell the list—notably one Monsieur Jenkins, whose British stolidity and eccentric French were a constant marvel.

All these lived permanently at Port Royal; but there were other hermits, who came and went. Some only appeared for a few days at Easter or Christmas in search of a *renouvellement*; others, of whom Pascal was one, had

their permanent lodging within the precincts, and stayed as long as they chose. The least ascetic went to the neighbouring castle of Vaumurier, where the Duke of Luynes kept open house for friends of the abbey. Pascal himself began his retreat by accepting the Duke's hospitality, but he soon passed on to the greater quiet of the actual hermitage. Last on the list of inmates come the 'faithful domestics,' always a characteristic feature at Port Royal. Typical of them was Innocent Fai, the holy carter, whom no amount of pious strategy could keep from sharing his wages, his clothes, and even his dinner, with those poorer than himself. Well might Fontaine 'gaze with ever-increasing wonder at the sight of all these men assembling at Port Royal. From many different provinces, nay, from different kingdoms they came, led by the star of grace. All unknown to each other they set forth, waiting for no human sign, for God Himself accomplished the whole work alone.'

Once in the hands of Lemaistre, their plan of life was soon sketched out. All rose at three in the morning for matins, and most attended the canonical hours throughout the day. Hair-shirts and plank-beds played an important part in their discipline; the soldier-penitents especially were what Lemaistre once called them—old stagers of the desert, who grew fat on vigils, and fasted with fire and sword. Many almost lived on air. Saci often dined off an apple; Hamon never touched anything but bread, and only ate that when he could not get the crusts thrown aside for the dogs. Most monasteries had their hours of recreation, but none such appeared on the time-table at Port Royal. They were permitted—that was all; and the hermits thought highly of those who used them well, but higher still of those who did not need them. How sombre their whole surroundings were may be judged from young Du Fossé's account of the time he spent alone with Saci shut up in a hiding-place during the days of persecution. 'There was little to

please the senses in my way of life. My whole time was spent in solitary study, and I never opened my lips except to talk with M. de Saci for a little while after dinner. But our conversations were more like a sermon or spiritual discourse; for that great man always kept a guard on his lips, lest he should be betrayed into a word that did not edify his neighbour. Still, I had joined him of my own free will, to escape a still more dreary solitude in the country —which goes to show how hard it is to find rest in this world. And yet it is well that we should realise its fickleness, because that makes us long to quit it, and hasten onwards to another world, where all is changeless and eternal.'

Manual labour provided the hermits with the chief break in their solitude. There was a floating rule at Port Royal—instituted in symbolical memory of Adam after the Fall—that every inmate should work with his hands for four hours a day. Each had his own department. Lemaistre, with some assistance from the Duke of Luynes, looked after the convent estates; under them was one ex-priest as bailiff, and another as head-gardener. Rivière, a half-pay officer, took charge of the woods; another old soldier undertook the humble functions of cobbler. Well might Angélique Arnauld boast that they had a Peer of France for their clerk of the works, and an old guardsman to mend their shoes. Hamon doctored the sick poor for miles around. Lancelot, Nicole, and Fontaine set up a school for the sons of friends of the abbey; a few months after Pascal's appearance there entered their most illustrious pupil, young Jean Racine, the future poet. Over all presided the confessors, Singlin, Saci, and Antoine Arnauld, younger brother of the abbess.

Arnauld's special business was to supervise the literary output of the hermits. Books played a large part in the lives of all, though many read simply for distraction, on the

principle that Satan waits on idle brains quite as much as on idle hands. Thus Rivière, the forester, made himself master of six languages, just to keep his mind employed during his lonely rounds in the woods. Andilly turned Josephus, St. Augustine's 'Confessions,' and other religious classics into singularly delicate French; at the time of Pascal's arrival Saci was just laying plans for a translation of the Bible. But every word a hermit wrote was passed through the co-operative sieve. A committee, headed by Antoine Arnauld, decided what his task should be. Fellow-labourers on the same field did what they could to help him. The finished draft went on to Nicole, most judicious of correctors. Next Fontaine, who wrote a clerkly hand, copied out the manuscript for the printers. Lastly Bascle, 'surveyor-general of accents and commas,' saw the proof-sheets through the press. The success of this combination was enormous. Saci was justified in his boast that Jansenist books of devotion sold by the score, while Jesuit manuals languished on the back-shelves of the book-shops with no customers but rats and moths.

Pascal was soon given a place at the editorial board. But, before his advice could be of much value, he must spend some time in anxiously pondering the how and why of his creed. At his first conversion he had got by heart the dry formulas of the 'Augustinus': now he must learn to clothe the skeleton with flesh. The task was not easy, even in the bosom of Port Royal: for the pioneers of a religious movement are commonly the last to realise what their own revival means. Of necessity practical men, they are engrossed by the practical evils immediately around them; and their first principles are struck out in the heat of battle rather than carefully elaborated beforehand. All of them might say with James Sterling: 'What we are going to is abundantly obscure, but what we are going from is very plain.' With the three founders of Jansenism this

was particularly the case, since their energies were displayed on three entirely different fields. Jansen professed divinity at a foreign university. Saint Cyran 'directed' distinguished consciences in Paris. Angélique Arnauld was abbess of a country convent. Their contributions to the cause were as diverse as their callings. From Saint Cyran came most of the wisdom and insight. Jansen translated these into technical theological terms, then the indispensable raiment of a new religious idea. Angélique Arnauld offered the movement a local habitation and a name, when she opened the doors of Port Royal to Saint Cyran.

The life of this celebrated lady has been told once for all by Sainte Beuve. One of the many daughters of an eminent lawyer, she was scarcely more than a child when her father's uncanonical astuteness smuggled her into the abbess's chair at Port Royal. For a while the uncongenial charge preyed on her spirits; but at last she made up her mind that, since she must be a nun, she would be one in good earnest. She began to reform her convent in the direction of its original Rule—and certainly reform was needed, for most French cloisters had sunk quite as low as the 'monks of Oxford' in the days of Edward Gibbon. But the technicalities of monastic observance did not long content her, and she took refuge in a rigorous asceticism—all the more rigorous, because she avoided the picturesque self-torture of mediæval saints, and deliberately chose practices that would seem small-minded or repulsive. It is to be feared, for instance, that she seldom troubled the laundress, though in this matter Jacqueline Pascal and the younger nuns refused to follow her example. But mortification for its own sake soon proved an arm of flesh, and Port Royal entered on a stage of mystical experiments and ecstasies. Angélique described to her niece—in due time a second abbess Angélique—how a deaf and dumb sister was once made to kneel all night before the altar, while the other nuns prayed over her, stopping every

now and then to ask if she had yet been granted the power of speech. 'But they were no more fortunate than Gehazi,' says Angélique the younger. 'Elisha himself could not have breathed life into an undertaking so little inspired by the Spirit of God.'

These vagaries ceased, when Saint Cyran took control of the convent; for his teaching brought Angélique exactly what her character needed. A born leader of women, her will had developed out of all proportion to her other faculties; she felt an irresistible impulse to engage in 'grand undertakings and plans entered upon at the call of a fancy, without the least thought of the Will of God.' Her masterfulness was her enemy; and her one hope lay in subduing it to a course of life she had not chosen, that should offer alike a cogent discipline and an illimitable range. Then, too, like many strong natures, she suffered from terrible fits of depression. 'Listen, my children,' she said to her nuns a few hours before her death, 'listen well to what I say. Most people do not know what death is, and never give the matter a thought. As for me, I have feared it all my life, and never let it out of my mind. But my worst forebodings were as nothing, compared with the terrors now upon me.' What were the best-laid schemes with this awful phantom in the back-ground? What were instinct of leadership, when she felt all the while like a criminal at the foot of the gallows, with the rope already round her neck? How could such as she answer for their own soul? 'The mockery of telling a man who does not know himself to go out and find God. The greater mockery of repeating this to one who does not know himself.' [1]

With neither of these alternating phases could popular Catholicism cope. The active side of Angélique's character could not live for ever on its broken meats, snatching one grace from a dogma, another from a sacrament, a third from

[1] Pascal, *Pens.* 509.

a monastic vow. For, if the Church was near enough, God was far away, hidden behind an infinitude of screens and veils ; only at the end of his pilgrimage could the believer hope to come face to face with Him. Jansenism thought it was ill trusting to this distant God : how would He be the end, unless He was also the beginning ? ' Inasmuch as our soul longs for Him,' said Pascal, ' we long also to approach Him only by means He has Himself ordained. We pray Him to become alike the Way, the Object, and the End.' Such maxims made still stronger appeal to Angélique in moments of depression. She could not rise up and go to God ; if she were to be saved at all, He must come to her. She must feel—and feel at once—the Presence Pascal found on that November night. ' This is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. He is the God of Christians, a God of love and consolation. He it is Who fills the hearts whereto He enters in. He makes them feel their wretchedness and the abundance of His mercy. He draws the depth of their soul into fellowship with Himself. He replenishes it with humility, with rejoicing, trust, and love. He makes them powerless to desire any end other than Himself.'

Angélique's spiritual history is typical of her age. During the first half of the seventeenth century French religion passed through a chaotic stage. It had been slowly drifting away from the moorings of official theology, ever since the schoolmen tried to turn it into a branch of metaphysics. Unsophisticated human sense was revolted by their technicalities ; as the Flemish Huguenots told King Philip II, they had *brouillé la sapience humaine parmi la sapience divine*. In Pascal's phrase, men longed for a prophet who would have done with these external proofs, and speak to them of God by direct, inward intuition. But for a while the voice of prophecy was dumb. Left to their undisciplined fancy, men were straying on every side. Some were experimenting with Du Vair, others with the ' geometrical God '

of Descartes; the weaker souls had taken up with new religious fashions from Italy or Spain—'bad little books,' says Gui Patin, 'full of miracles and monkish revelations, cords of St. Francis and girdles of St. Margaret.' Most true were the words Pierre Charron wrote just as the century dawned: 'Religion means knowing and serving God, but the second depends altogether on the first. How much happier should we all be, if we tried as hard to know Him as we do to serve Him ill! Some fancy Him a weak, effeminate creature, whom caresses and endearments will cajole. Others spend days and nights in self-torture, in order to soften His heart of steel. Others prefer to drive a hard bargain, and think they can get the better of Him. All are ready to lay down the law about His nature and His works with the calmest self-assurance. His name is every moment on their lips; they judge Him according to a passing whim. They talk to Him, and ask Him for things which they would be ashamed to mention to a man of honour. Instead of cleansing their soul from earthly images and thoughts, they array Him in their passions, and bedizen Him in their appetites. Instead of mounting up to Him, they drag Him down to their level. Each man works away to his liking at his notion of a divinity. He swells it out, he gives it a body, he makes it such a one as himself.'

However, deliverance was to come from an unexpected quarter. For years the Flemish university of Louvain had been the battle-ground of two contending factions. On one side were the orthodox schoolmen, the 'theologasters' scoffed at by Erasmus for teaching nothing that was worth the knowing, and everything that were better left unlearnt. On the other side were those who took to heart the satirist's advice, and thought it better to be 'weak in Duns Scotus, but strong in St. Paul, than to be crammed with all the learning of Durandus and ignorant of the Law of Christ.' The first party swore by Aristotle and logic; the second was

all for religious experience and mystical interpretations of Scripture. Naturally enough it fought under the banner of St. Augustine, secular representative of ardent Christian feeling, as opposed to the cool, critical spirit radiating from Stagyra. The founder of this party, Michael de Bay (1513–89), had long been in his grave, but his school survived him, and his mantle had eventually fallen on the shoulders of Cornelius Jansen. Officially Jansen ranks first among the leaders of the party to which he gave his name; personally he was uninteresting. A Dutchman by birth and a Fleming by education, he was the typical professor, endlessly learned on his own subject, but with small eye for the outside world. Pupils reported him very unsociable, of the opinion that a dinner-party and a college meeting were equal hindrances to work; while that his jokes were of a dry order—'erat in leporibus siccus'—may be readily imagined. In the class-room he was hard; backward pupils he drove forward with 'cuffs and cruel blows, nor did he even spare such as were already priests.' In his opinions he was harder still; he was not one to sugar down unpleasant truths with a *forte* or a *fortassis*. But the full extent of his divergence from the beaten track only appeared on the publication of his post-humous 'Augustinus,' the work of his lifetime. Pascal had already made acquaintance with this book at Rouen, although without gauging its real importance; for the 'Augustinus' is much more than a treatise on Predestination. Although couched in technical scholastic language, it is an organised attack on the first principles of scholasticism. Had Jansen's power of persuasion been equal to his zeal, he would have been the last professional divine; and his book would now lie buried under the ruins of the superstition it destroyed.

But why did Carthage need destruction? Scholasticism had grievously decayed since the days of Dante and Aquinas. Setting forth to embody the *credo, ut intelligam* in action, and

translate the mysteries of faith into human language, it had fallen a victim to the excellence of its own methods; language proved too strong for mystery. From an indispensable tool it had grown into an all-exacting master; provided that they could settle accounts with language, the theologians cared for little else. Spending their whole lives in argument, they naturally took for granted that logic could get to the bottom of any and every problem, speculative and practical alike. Breathing a purely academic air, it cost them no effort to abstract away from the many sides of existence that refuse to fit neatly into a syllogism; small interest had a fact for them, until it had been attenuated into an aspect, or relegated to its place in a classification. Having thus complacently swept aside most of the real complexities of life, their course was triumphantly easy. Like the Cartesians, they could boast that they alone were clear and simple. They knew exactly what they said, and said exactly what they meant; they had an answer for every opponent. In their hands theology became a kind of tilting-match—the dialectical fisticuffs described in the opening chapters of the 'Augustinus.' The great thing was to be original. 'Boldness brings victory, victory belief.' But dullards who could not invent a new opinion might, at any rate, demolish old; for under the stress of argument nothing was assured. 'What is held probable to-day will be considered false to-morrow, and the certainty of yesterday becomes the paradox of to-day.' Thus did theology become 'a Tower of Babel for confusion, and a Cimmerian region for obscurity.'

Perhaps Jansen was too much inclined to put down to malice aforethought what was really the fruit of misdirected energy. The theologians did not fling their fury into theses —to borrow a phrase from Bossuet—because they enjoyed the exercise, so much as because they felt afraid to trust the commonest facts of religious experience, unless they could

turn them into a proposition. They talk of sin,' wrote Michael de Bay, ' as though it were a clever puzzle invented by some visionary dreamer, which must be pondered over and believed, although nobody could feel or grasp it.' How could they do otherwise ? They were disciples of Aristotle, the great master of scientific detachment ; and detachment means leaving the arguments to speak for themselves, with a minimum of interference from the private prejudices of the thinker. Experience of sin is a personal matter. I may feel it in one way, my neighbour in another ; or perhaps it does not visit him at all. How, then, can it become the basis of a demonstration ? If I wish to be understood in a lecture-room, I must carefully abstract away from all that is peculiar to myself, and deal only with points that can be made ' equally convincing to all beings of equal rationality.' Not, indeed, that I am bound to follow the Stoic practice of crushing my emotions altogether. They have their place at the Lady-altar, or round the statue of the patron saint ; but in the schools reason must reign alone.

Jansen's first object was to forbid this unnatural divorce between reason and the feelings—to couple argument with reverence, and sound sense with piety. So had Augustine proceeded, ' not by faith only, but by intelligence of faith,' *per fidei intellectum*. ' Just as from a tree spring seeds, and from a seed new trees, so knowledge of the Christian Faith engenders charity, and charity fresh knowledge. Light kindles fire, and fire gives light ; and by their alternating aid the Christian reaches a fulness of charity and wisdom.' So did not proceed the schoolmen. Their two ideals were lucidity and logical completeness ; and Jansen thought lucidity, at best, a thin-blooded virtue. What was really worth saying said itself, or was not said at all. Nor was it possible to squeeze every drop of meaning out of an idea, without squeezing away its savour as well. In the interests of clearness the schoolmen threw over Augustine for

Aristotle. For their intellectualism took lightly for granted that logic is always and everywhere one and the same; so that, in exchanging the African for the Greek, they were only exchanging the cloudier for the clearer brain. Jansen thought otherwise. Alike in instincts, principles, methods, Augustine and Aristotle were as the poles asunder. One was wholly intent on the spiritual world; the other never lifted his eyes from off the ground. Jansen was never tired of reviling this most materialistic of heathen sages, whose quibbling pedantries were ever turned to matters of this earth. '*Minutiloquio suo sola terrena perscrutatus est.*' It was madness to dream of translating what was above humanity into terms of his *pura, puta philosophia.* How could a theologian 'speak of divine things divinely,' when his voice must issue through the Aristotelian Categories?

These were designed for the study of external Nature, and they took for granted that all her secrets could be brought within the grasp of human reason. Set them to work on the idea of God, and perforce they went along the same assumption. The veil of mystery was dragged away from the truths of faith, in proportion as the Categories reduced them to the level of a mere physical process. God appeared by no means so holy—sin did not seem so heinous, nor grace and love so necessary—once scholasticism had passed these ideas through the Aristotelian sieve. Theologians felt themselves increasingly exact to span all God's circumference; and the more they conned the measurements, the narrower looked the gulf between their Maker and themselves. *Du gleichst dem Geist den Du begreifst* held a joyful truth for them. But, if human intelligence could reach up to the inmost secrets of God's Essence, it seemed somewhat ludicrous to pretend that human powers of action were altogether dependent on His help. The more experience faded away under the glare of logic, the louder grew the theologians in their assertion of free will, the more steadily

they whittled away at the necessity of grace. 'Go and get yourself predestined, if you are not so already,' was the characteristic utterance of one eminent sixteenth-century divine. To this the first answer was Luther and the Reformation; the second was the Louvain Movement led by Jansen and de Bay. Greatly as the two revolts differ in importance, they agree in this that both insisted fiercely on the servitude of the will.

The elements of the case for Necessity Pascal had already studied at Rouen. At his first conversion he had acknowledged that, without grace, he could not develop his ethical self; but he was still too much under the influence of Du Vair not to take for granted that the development of that self was the first duty of religion. Jansen quickly undeceived him. Religion meant the love and service of God. The holier a man became, the more did these absorb him, and blot out all thought of self. But Libertarians could never be wholly lost in God, never go forward in His service with a single heart. Being endowed with the 'dignity of causality,' their chief attention must be riveted on their own states of mind. Pascal soon noticed an ugly likeness between this dignity of causality and the development of the ethical self. Both kept the lime-light fixed on the *Moi*, the fussy, chattering, surface self; both thrust its Maker back into the second place. 'So long as a man seeketh his own highest good because it is his,' wrote a German forerunner of Port Royal, 'he will never find it. For in that he doeth this, he seeketh himself, and deemeth himself his own highest good.'

Besides, the Libertarians were doubly hampered in God's service. On their theory their will was an independent agent; and their best efforts must accordingly be spent not in doing what God asked, but in bringing their rebellious *Moi* into readiness to do so. Nor could they even know beforehand what He would have of them. They must wait till a spontaneous impulse sprang up in their mind. Then they

referred it to their conscience; and if conscience approved they carried it out, hoping that God also would approve it, when he afterwards came to review their conduct. Trust in such *ex post facto* sanctions seemed cold comfort to Jansen. On his principles, God 'predetermined' the will—that is, He created the good desire itself; although, psychologically speaking, it arose in the same way as any natural inclination. Indeed, it was sometimes hard to determine whether an impulse came from God, or not. But such moments of doubting were the exception, sent as a lesson in humility. For the most part the believer felt invincibly persuaded that —in the glowing phrase of Luther—God's will and his were met in one, just as fire and iron fuse in a red-hot bar. Libertarians might talk as they pleased about the harshness of denying man his liberty. Jansen answered that the only freedom really worth having was freedom to be good and wise. Even professed defenders of free will admitted that the need of effort showed a blemish. Divines put the state of *non posse peccare* far above mere *posse non peccare*; and their great lay ally, Descartes, was always insisting that a well-trained will follows reason automatically, without the least hint of a struggle. Why, then, should not God adopt the same method with His servants, and make their will answer 'automatically' to the touch of grace?

Libertarians might have spoken in less self-confident tones, had they ever paused to reflect that God's ways might be very different from theirs. 'Having had no practice in creating merit, but only in rewarding deserts already before them,' says Pascal, 'they judge of God by themselves.'[1] On their principles, the great test of merit was difficulty of attainment; the harder my lesson was, the more credit do I get for having learnt it. Jansenism would have none of a standard so heavy with the smell of the *Moi*. Ideals ceased to be true or false in themselves; the only

[1] *Pens.* 490.

measure of their value was the trouble a *Moi* might have in reaching them. This doctrine many Libertarians were applying to the truth of Christianity itself. It was generally admitted that intense meditation, coupled with intense purity of life, had brought certain 'heathen' philosophers to a faint, twilight knowledge of God. Thereupon arose the question whether Marcus Aurelius was not really a better man than many commonplace Christians, who had made infinitely less use of immeasurably greater opportunities. To Jansen the very raising of this problem seemed utterly preposterous. Christianity was God's sovereign goodness, sovereign truth. Those who received it had seen the light; those who received it not were in outer darkness. To say that the second were sometimes better than the first was like arguing that cold is sometimes warmer than heat. Such a question would never have been asked by men who had real knowledge of God's nature. But free will did not let its votaries wait until He chose to tell them about Himself. Nursed in the dignity of their causality, they must be up and doing, while their imagination hurriedly put together makeshift divinities of its own. In other words, they would be religious in the way that pleased them best. They asked the *Moi* to lead them to God, and the *Moi* replied by giving them an easy, broad criterion of truth suited to their respective tastes. It bade the logicians test their beliefs by *barbara* and *baralipton*. It had a smile for the narrow formalist supremely anxious to be orthodox; it had a kind word for the ecclesiastical politician resolute to shape his creed along the lines most likely to farther the temporal interests of the Church. It even befriended pious virtuosi of the type of Father Le Moyne and Father Barry, so deft in hiding the grosser features of the Gospel under the musk and pachouli of *préciosité*. No doubt, all these men meant excellently well; but good intentions cannot manufacture a religion. 'Men look up to Heaven,

but they build on the sand. Then comes an earthquake, and down they fall with their eyes still fixed on the sky.' [1]

The 'Augustinus' was a heroic attempt to build on the solid rock. Why had the Aristotelians gone wrong? Because, like the Sophists of old, they made the *Moi* the intellectual measure of all things. Why did Du Vair go wrong? Because he made the *Moi* the most interesting of all things. Why was the religion of the age chaotic? Because its ideas of God depended on the vagaries of the *Moi*. Hence Jansen's aim was to preach a doctrine altogether objective, altogether independent of the *Moi*. Divine truth should no longer run aground among the tortuous channels of a human understanding: it must shine directly into the heart. Divine grace should no longer wait on the good pleasure of a human conscience: 'irresistibly, unfailingly, victoriously,' the will of God must work out its purposes in man. Free will had encouraged him to set up false gods of his own; necessity should teach him to wait until the true God came to him. Free will had made men slow in His service, even uncertain how to serve; necessity should rob the laggard of every hesitation, every excuse. Free will left souls to choose how and when they would be pious; necessity proclaimed that they had no choice to make. 'The moment you lose sight of God,' cried Agnes Arnauld to her nuns, 'begin to seek for Him again. For this you do not need to be clever, only to come to Him. He is alike the Way on which we find Him, the Guide who helps us in the search, and the Reason why we seek. All things are of Him, in Him, by Him; only the human mind is always eager to do something, and decide on its own path to Heaven.'

[1] *Pens.* 488.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CONVERT

To establish principles is one thing: to set them in practice is quite another. The 'Augustinus' laid the foundation-stone of Jansenism when it insisted that truth and happiness can only be reached by sacrificing the *Moi* to God. But Jansen could do little himself for the spread of his ideas. He came seldom to France; even Angélique Arnauld had never seen him; he died before his chief manifesto left the printer's hands. Nor were matters much bettered when the 'Augustinus' was launched upon the world. In the 'Provincial Letters' Pascal was bold enough to declare that it was 'not very long'; really it comprises three folio volumes in Latin, each made up of many hundred pages. Hence the necessity of translating its ideas into everyday language; and that was the work of Saint Cyran and the second generation at Port Royal. Of this Antoine Arnauld was the official leader, Pierre Nicole the most immediately popular writer, Pascal the abiding representative. Each of these three followed a line of his own. Arnauld commanded the heavy artillery of argument and quotation. Nicole, a many-sided personage, who stood half-way between the priesthood and the laity—he was a 'clerk in minor orders'—skimmed off as much of Arnauld's cream as suited Mme. de Sévigné's taste. Pascal left dogma to his colleagues, and contented himself with supporting their conclusions by arguments drawn from the facts of human nature,

How, then, persuade the world that it could only attain to truth by sacrificing its *Moi* to God? The intellectualists, Catholic and Cartesian, were still in the ascendant; and they felt quite sure that truth could be reached through scientific detachment from all interests but those of logic. How persuade them of their mistake? Plainly by showing that scientific detachment was an empty dream, and that their conclusions were really dictated by their *Moi*—that is, by their tastes and inclinations. 'The functions of the will are altogether unique. It does not actually form our judgments; but, if it takes a fancy to one side, it keeps reason's attention fixed on the arguments that make in favour of that side, and dissuades it from dwelling on such points as make in the opposite direction. And reason, acting in concert with will, decides the issue on the facts before it.'[1] The intellectualists chose to think themselves dispensed from the common lot of humanity: Pascal set himself to show that their opinions were just as much determined by their *Moi* as the veriest unthinking prejudice of the vulgar herd. The Aristotelian divines, for instance, were always boasting that their theology was the rigorous outcome of pure logic. But Jansen had shown that it punched, clipped, teased the facts of Revelation into conformity with their arbitrary Categories; just as at the Paris Club Pascal had seen intellectualists of another colour punch, clip, tease the facts of Nature into conformity with universal mechanism.

Nor were they the only offenders. On all sides men insisted on 'judging Nature by our standards, not by hers.' They saw things as they wished to see them, instead of as they really were. They were ready with their verdict, before a case was half-way through; if they listened to the evidence at all, it was only to grasp at points that made in favour of their preconceived opinion. Scholastic science

[1] *Pens.* 99.

bowed to the *Moi*, when it picked out, as the essential 'purpose' of an object, whichever of its characteristics happened to be most interesting or most important to man. The *Précieuses* curtsied to the *Moi*, when they 'masked and disguised the face of Nature,' so as to improve on her vulgarity. Descartes did homage to the *Moi*, when he masked and disguised Nature in another fashion, by endowing her physical processes with a fancied regularity which they were far from possessing in fact. Lastly, Escobar and the casuists put on the chains of the *Moi*, when they masked and disguised the Law of God in order to make it more acceptable to a fashionable flock. Thus the *Moi* was equally dangerous—equally 'hateful'—on the religious and on the scientific field. Tillemont—the one really eminent historian Jansenism produced—abjured it both as a scholar and as Christian, when he said that he wished to put into his books nothing but what his authorities told him, without adding one syllable of his own.

Tillemont's wish has often been echoed by brethren of his craft; but can it be carried out in fact? Can we escape from self altogether to the calm regions of the *Ding an sich?* Pascal answers that we cannot. No doubt education will deliver us from the grosser forms of anthropomorphism—from believing, for instance, that stocks and stones felt literal horror at a vacuum. And geometry so far fulfilled the ideal of research that its problems worked themselves out in comparative indifference to the wishes of the student. But then, mathematics only owe their freedom from the *Moi* to the fact that they deal with abstractions. The nearer we come to the solid earth, the more does objectivity forsake us—the more we 'besmear things with our qualities, and cast the shadow of our composite being over their simplicity.' In other words, we cannot come directly face to face with facts external to our mind. If we are to understand them at all, we must unconsciously arrange

them in a certain perspective; otherwise they would be as meaningless as the vague blur reflected by a photographic plate, before the right focus has been found. And what is true of our judgments of fact is still more true of our judgments of value. All depends on the bias with which we start, on the focus of our mental photographic plate. In other words, all depends on the will; and Pascal's great complaint against it is that it never manages to hit on the right focus, or even to keep steadily to any one focus at all. Its standpoint is always shifting about, sometimes for assignable causes, more often for reasons beyond our ken. 'When we are too young, our judgment is faulty; so it is, when we are too old. If we know too much about a subject, or if we know too little, it monopolises us, and we get it on the brain. If we look through our books too soon after writing them, we are not critical enough; if we put off too long we cannot get back into touch with them. A picture can only be properly seen from one particular coign of vantage; any other place is too high or too low, too near or too far. In matters of art the rules of perspective determine what that place shall be; but in matters of truth and morals who will point it out?' [1]

The more important the question at stake, the greater the perplexity of the will. Clearly all a man desires must centre round his conception of the end of life; yet it would puzzle most men to explain coherently at what goal they were aiming, or by what means they expected to attain it. Everywhere there was a deplorable lack of 'rules of perspective.' Go down into the market-place and ask what is the sovereign good. 'The people will answer that it is wealth or success; at the lowest, they will say amusement. The philosophers have seen the folly of all that, and placed the sovereign good where they best could.' [2] Turn to these 'clear-sighted schoolmasters of mankind,' and see what

[1] *Pens.* 381. [2] *Pens.* 462.

light they throw on the matter. At any rate they offer the world a bewildering variety of choice; Montaigne reckons that they put forward no less than two hundred and eighty different kinds of *summum bonum*. 'One says it is virtue; another says pleasure; a third is for truth, a fourth for understanding of Nature. "Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas." A fifth believes in total ignorance; the next in refusing to be hoodwinked by appearances; a seventh holds with admiring nothing. "Nihil mirari prope res una, quae possit facere et servare beatum." True sceptics point to their ataraxia, doubt and suspension of judgment; other and wiser heads imagine that they can do a little better than that. A fine dance do they all lead us. It would be enough for anyone, if only reason was reasonable.'[1]

Still, the philosophers go for little. They are academic recluses living in small touch with realities, and wrangling away among themselves just to pass the time. Lawyers, on the other hand, are equally at home with speculation and practice; their profession forces them to deal much in general principles, but to apply these in the light of common sense. No class of men could be better fitted to show us how to see things in a right perspective, and to the lawyers Pascal accordingly goes. Unfortunately, he goes in vain. They are as little able to tell him what they mean by justice as were the philosophers to expound the nature of the sovereign good. 'Had they known what it was they would not have laid down—as they have done all over the world—that a man ought to follow the customs of his country. True equity would be on the throne in every land and age; and law-givers would not have fallen back on Persian idiosyncrasies or German whims. As it is, all our ideas of justice and injustice change places as often as they change their climate. Three degrees of longitude nullify a whole system of jurisprudence.

[1] *Pens.* 73.

A meridian decides on truth. A few years of prescription are enough to upset fundamental principles. Laws have their day, and the entry of Saturn into Leo marks the addition of a new crime to the statute-book. Quaint is the justice that a river bounds. What is true on one side of the Pyrénées spells error on the other.' [1]

At this point, however, Pascal bethinks himself that he may have been following a false track. He has been asking for an abstract definition; and a pupil of Méré could not forget that intuition often succeeds where geometrical methods fail. It may well be that men possess the power of judging rightly, although they cannot explain how they come by their decisions. Let us, therefore, take a subject altogether free from metaphysical obscurities. Everyone knows what happiness is, and everyone wishes to be happy. 'That is the one rule without an exception. The will never takes a step towards another object. It is the motive of all the actions of everyone, down to those who take a rope and hang themselves.' But does the will succeed in its aim? 'Without the help of faith none has ever yet reached the goal, towards which all have been struggling for many a hundred years. All grieve alike: princes and subjects, gentle and simple, wise and foolish, young and old, strong and feeble, sick and whole, men of all ranks, all ages, all countries, and all times. They might have learnt from the long unbroken failure of all their efforts that to make ourselves happy is beyond our power; but experience can teach us little. There is always a hair's breadth of difference between one case and another. To this we cling in the desperate hope that this time our expectations will not be disappointed, as they have always been before. Thus does experience delude us; from evil to evil it leads us on, till death fills up our cup of misery for ever.' [2]

[1] *Pens.* 294. [2] *Pens.* 425.

What was the use, then, of looking for definite rules of perspective, when men so utterly failed to reach the thing they all desired—the one thing that none of them could help desiring? But why did they fail? Why were all of them unhappy? Pascal answers that it was because their *Moi* lived in a state of chronic discontent with itself and its surroundings, was always trying to 'mask and disguise' them into something they were not. 'Man would like to be great: he knows he is small. He would like to be happy: he knows he is wretched. He would like the love and esteem of his fellows: he knows that his weaknesses only deserve their indignation and contempt. In his trouble he gives way to the wickedest passion there could be; for he harbours a violent hatred of the truth that brings his faults to light. He would blot it out altogether if he could. As that is impossible, he does his best to stifle it by hiding his defects from his own and other eyes. Our neighbours treat us as we wish to be treated. We hate the truth: they keep it from us. We wish to be befooled, and they befool us. We wish to be flattered, and they flatter us. Thus our whole life is one elaborate pretence, spent in alternately duping and adulating each other. All human intercourse rests on a mutual deception; there would be few friendships left if men knew what their comrades said about them, so soon as their back was turned.'[1]

This cool attempt to burke the truth—or what Pascal took to be such—must needs seem altogether intolerable to a member of the Paris Club. Unlike philosophers and poets, a man of science cannot bid realities good-bye, and sail off to some moonlit dreamland of his own; to some extent, at least, he must judge Nature by her standards, not by his. No doubt his conclusions will not altogether escape the evil influence of the *Moi*. He may be over-hasty in generalisation; he may overlook, or even deliberately

[1] *Pens.* 100.

suppress whole masses of inconvenient detail. But he cannot altogether forget that he lives under a reign of law, where everything has its place, and the place of everything depends on the place of everything else. Does not Pascal himself lay down that all the phenomena of nature are 'alike caused and causing, acted on and agents, and all are held together by an invisible chain that links the farthest and the most unlike?' But man himself is part of this chain. May he, then, hope to escape its pressure by trying to ignore its existence, or pretending that it does not gall him? Does not wisdom bid him look facts manfully in the face, and make the best of the universe as it is?

After all, is its bondage so hard to bear? Does not a man lose more than he gains, if he lives what Plato calls the life of a shell-fish, shut up altogether in his *Moi*? Méré and Miton thought so when they urged their pupils to be 'universal'—that is, to come out of themselves and share in the life of a larger whole. No doubt their 'whole' was only a Paris drawing-room, but Pascal was quick to see that the lesson applied to more important organisms. In a moral, no less than a physical sense, we live in a world we did not make; we did not invent our country, our calling, our family, or even our bodily frame. We think of these things as mere appendages to our *Moi*; really we are much more part of them than they are part of us. If they, and all they represent, were suddenly blotted out of our lives, how much would be left behind? Look closely, and the *Moi* itself dissolves into a fugitive congeries of disconnected properties. 'What is the *Moi*? If a man loves a girl for her looks, does he love her for herself? No; if the small-pox spoilt her beauty, his passion would soon be over. If people esteem my judgment and good sense, are they esteeming me? No; for I might lose both, and still continue to be. Where, then, is this precious *Moi*, if it is neither in the body nor the mind? And how respect either,

except for their qualities—which, being perishable, are not integral parts of the self? Are we to love the abstract essence of our neighbour's soul? That would be both impossible and unfair.'[1] And Pascal soon reaches the conclusion that we only begin to be, when our individuality is merged in something greater than ourselves. 'To be a member is to have neither life, nor being, nor power of motion, except in the body and for the body. A severed limb can only lead a perishing and dying life. Inasmuch, however, as it does not know that it belongs to a body, it aspires to be its own centre and its own all. But because it lacks the springs of life, it cannot fail to go astray, and marvel at the incertitude of its state; for it feels that it is not a body, and yet it does not know that it forms part of a larger whole. But at last it begins to know itself, and returns, as it were, to its true home. Now it loves itself only for the sake of the body, and laments its bygone errors.'[2]

As an abstract proposition, all this might be impressive enough; but nobody knew better than Pascal that abstract propositions have a knack of looking exceedingly foolish when they are translated into the tongue of common sense. Why should the plain man love himself only for the sake of the body? How induce the *Moi* to make the many sacrifices incidental to becoming part of a larger whole? Méré and Miton answered that society alone could make a man 'both happy and amiable at the same time?' But did not this involve a contradiction? While under the Chevalier's tutelage, Pascal had done his best to be universal, and join in all that happened to interest his neighbours; but 'happiness,' for one of his temper, meant doing things a great deal better than they could. And that was just what 'amiability' forbade. How, then, reconcile the two? Miton simply shrugged his shoulders, and lounged past the dilemma; but Pascal had no love for

[1] *Pens.* 323. [2] *Pens.* 483.

a *solvitur ambulando*. Opposing principles must be harmonised beforehand, not left in a vague hope that they would somehow shake down together on the road. In Miton's own case they had not done so. As a Libertine, he was bound to be 'natural'—that is, always to act spontaneously, without any show of effort. That was just what he did not do. As Pascal says, he 'covered his *Moi*,' but he did not 'remove' it;[1] the selfish impulse was still alive, although it never left the background. Still, to keep it there implied a certain strain, even on the part of a man whose trained inertia reduced all tension to the lowest point; and Pascal could argue that society failed in the problem of making a man both happy and amiable at the same time.

Where Miton failed, Jansen succeeded, when once his 'Augustinus' was read in the light of certain mystical experiences that came to Pascal on a November night in 1654. And to explain why he succeeded, it is only necessary to recall some of the chief characteristics of religious conversion. Of what did Pascal stand in need? He wished to be happy. To be happy, he must possess the art of seeing things in their true perspective; and he had convinced himself that this art could only be learnt by one who gave up considering things simply as they touched himself, and viewed them from the standpoint of a larger, more impersonal whole. But Pascal still remembered enough of the teaching of his Libertine masters to insist that this change must be 'natural' and spontaneous. Whatever the obligations implied in membership of the larger whole, they must not come before him like an external law. They must not be thought of as duties at all; they must seem the obvious thing to do, a simple matter of course. Hence not only his acts, but the inclinations behind them, must undergo a radical transformation; the

[1] *Pens.* 455.

new self must no more be tempted to sigh for the freedom of the old than an invalid—to use Pascal's own comparison—is tempted to sigh for the pleasures of rude health. 'When we are well we wonder how we could ever put up with a sick-room. When we are ill we take our medicine gaily, and lose all taste for walks and excursions.' [1]

All these things Pascal gained at conversion. 'To be converted, to receive grace, to experience religion,' says William James, 'are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior, and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior, and happy.' How is this result attained? Perhaps the best answer will be found in modern theories of subliminal consciousness. Much of our thinking is done without our knowledge. Ideas lodge, strike root, and ripen in the mind without attracting more than our most casual attention, until they suddenly spring on us full-grown, as did Minerva from the brain of Jove. Nay, in certain exceptional persons whole net-works of ideas and desires—a second character, in fact—may form beneath the usual self, much as the new skin of a snake grows up beneath the old. In due time the old skin cracks, rends, is sloughed off, and the animal emerges fresh and glossy in his summer dress. So is it with the convert. During the period of 'incubation' he may not know that any change is coming. But presently his old skin cracks, and there comes a spell of hesitation and unrest. Like Pascal, he is torn in two between 'things visible but vain, and things invisible but real.' One moment he is blindly groping towards a dimly realised ideal; the next moment old habits and associations draw him sharply back.

To us common men such a condition may seem bearable enough. We feel no overpowering need to unify our character. We are quite content to be one thing at home,

[1] *Pens.* 109.

and another in our office; we keep this moral code for Sunday, that one for the rest of the week. But the souls that crowd the mourners' bench at a revival meeting are made of very different stuff. To jog aimlessly along is the one thing they cannot do. As Professor Murisier says, their personality is ill cemented. Unlike us, they cannot frankly be one thing at one time. Night and day they are the prey of two opposing inclinations. Desire of 'things invisible' poisons all their pleasures; the memory of 'things visible' intrudes on all their prayers. Hence, their passionate longing for the unity that, for them, spells rest and peace. But that unity they cannot purchase for themselves. The outstanding fact in conversion is its apparent independence of the subject's will. He is—or seems to himself to be—a passive agent in the matter, a mere bystander on the field where the forces of unity give battle to the forces of chaos and division; and he often follows the phases of the fight with the same lively, but impersonal, interest that hospital patients show in noting the inroads of their disease. But conscious effort serves his turn as little as it would serve the patient who took to physicking himself. He could only bring effective help to the forces of unity, if he knew exactly whither they were tending; and how can he possibly tell what the travail of subconscious forces may bring forth? All he knows is that he is very wretched, that a great upheaval is impending within him, and that it will somehow do him good. Why not, then, put into practice the revivalist doctrine of self-surrender? Why not fold his hands, and let the mysterious stirrings within him take their way?

Unchecked by meddlesome interference on the part of conscious will, the forces of organic ripening move swiftly on to their appointed end. There comes a moment of sudden crisis. The convert's spiritual centre of gravity sways, totters, finally crashes over from the old character to

the new. Henceforward it alone is *the* self; it fixes the focus of all the soul's judgments, determines what Pascal would call all its lines of perspective. The old unregenerate character disappears; at most, it hangs for a while about the outer fringes of consciousness, a tattered, disreputable *Moi*. Unity is attained. Hitherto the convert's stream of nervous energy has been divided. Even if the main current flowed towards 'things invisible,' there was a wasteful drainage towards the channel of 'things visible.' Now that channel is silting up; the whole body of his mental power runs along one bed. Hence the stream is wider and deeper than ever before; the soul's grasp of 'things invisible' is strengthened and increased, till it amounts to a revelation. 'The first effect of conversion,' says Pascal, 'is that we see the world and ourselves from a standpoint altogether new.' New also are the feelings of relief after struggle, of peace and harmony, of strength suddenly acquired, that the triumph of unity brings in its train. The convert is caught up into a world of grandeurs hitherto unknown. While shackled to the *Moi* he was a prisoner in a strange land, cooped up in narrow bounds of space and time. Its chains once broken, he feels heir to immensities beyond all telling.

Few men can long keep their feelings locked up within their breast. Sooner or later comes the need of an *Affektentladung*; the convert must give utterance to his emotions, must hang them round some definite object, refer them to some person as their cause. And who should that person be but God? Every feature in his conversion—its suddenness, the greatness of the change effected, its independence of his conscious will—seems to him convincing proof that he has been visited by irresistible grace. And what is that but God Himself? Converts are seldom theologians; they do not trouble to distinguish between the thing given and the Giver. The peace, the strength, the buoyancy,

that since conversion have been theirs, are not simply gifts of God; they are His very Essence. 'A God,' says Luther characteristically, 'is that to which thou must ascribe all good, and fly for help in times of trouble; so that to have a God is nothing other than to trust and believe in Him with all thy heart. As I have often said, faith and trust will make thee either God or an idol. If thy trust is true, then is also thy God true; but, if thy trust be false, the true God is not with thee.' Hence comes the peculiar inwardness of the convert's religion. The God of most men is external. As Fénelon said they behave in His Presence as though they were in the company of one whom they saw seldom, and then only on the most ceremonial occasions; they are weary, they are ill at ease, they long to make their escape. But converts never long to escape from their Maker. How should they, when all that makes them worthy to be—strength, wisdom, insight, peace of mind—is bound up in fellowship with Him? 'In Thy light shall we see light' is no empty phrase to them.

Wo ich Ihn nur habe
Ist mein Vaterland,
Und es fällt mir jede Gabe
Wie ein Erbteil in die Hand.

Thus the last word of Port Royal was the Love of God. Jansen had obscured the real issue by following Augustine too closely, and the Augustinian theology is marred by what the Germans call a touch of thingliness. God was Love, no doubt, and Love was Grace; but Jansen was inclined to treat both as gifts of God rather than as aspects of God Himself. Besides, his uncouth terminology cast a needlessly mechanical colouring over his book. Irresistible grace at once called up the idea of an armed external force ruthlessly trampling down men's natural inclinations. Nothing could be farther from the real meaning of the 'Augustinus.' As Saint Cyran said, men did wrong to

treat grace and free will as absolute contradictories. Each term implied the other; charity carried freedom with it, just as freedom carried charity. In other words, irresistible grace was only a technical academic name for irresistible love; and a Christian's love for God was just as 'natural,' just as much a part of himself as Romeo's for Juliet. And it was 'irresistible' in precisely the same sense as the love that drove Antigone to disobey the orders of her king was resistless in the fight, *ἀνίκατος μάχαν*. But how or why the love arose—why it called one, and not another—neither Sophocles, nor Shakespeare, nor Saint Cyran could explain. All the Jansenist convert knew was that the love was there. All in a moment he was 'touched by God.' He was caught up into the grip of a mysterious Power; some strange, spiritual chemistry blotted out his former tastes and inclinations, and left him a new being. What could he do but render grateful thanks to God? 'I love poverty,' says Pascal, 'because He loved it. I love goods, because they enable me to succour the needy. I keep faith with all the world, I do not return evil for evil; and I would that those who wish me harm had reached a state like mine beyond the power of men to make or mar. I try to be true and just to all, and I feel peculiar tenderness for those to whom God has more closely bound me. In all my actions, public and private, I keep in view Him Who will one day judge them, and to Whom they are all offered up beforehand. Such are my feelings. Every day of my life I bless my Redeemer, Who has implanted them within me. Out of a mass of weakness and misery, pride, ambition, and ill will He has made a man freed from all these evils by the power of Grace.'[1]

[1] *Pens.* 550.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW LIFE

'"Were I to see a miracle," they say, "I should be converted on the spot." How can they be so sure about a matter that they understand so little? They suppose that conversion means holding with God the sort of drawing-room conversation that they can picture to themselves beforehand. True conversion means abasing ourselves before Him whom we have so often provoked that He may at any moment justly destroy us. It means that we can do nothing without His help, and deserve nothing but His wrath. It means that there is a great gulf fixed between us and Him; and that, if there were no Mediator, the chasm would never be bridged.'[1] In short, men's own efforts could not lead them to God. As Saint Cyran said: they must wait till He spoke *once* to their soul as directly as He spoke to St. Paul on the road to Damascus. But even after the most striking conversion much still remained to be done. God's thunder-claps might remove the *Moi* from the centre of the mind: they seldom expelled it from the circumference. Hence Saint Cyran was always dwelling on the difference between bodily and spiritual medicine. A broken leg might heal completely, or a fever be successfully fought; and then, as he says with a stray touch of humour, the doctor would be much annoyed if his former patients took to haunting his consulting-room. But in spiritual medicine the patient never got free of his Physician, nor

[1] *Pens.* 470.

was it fitting that he should. When Saint Cyran uttered the scholastic tag, *Gratia ad singulos actus datur*, he meant the words in the most literal sense that they can bear; he meant all that scandalised Blaise Pascal at his early visits to Port Royal. Every single action of a Christian required immediate prompting from on High. 'None of your thoughts, and none of your deeds can avail you, unless at the very moment you receive them of God. He forms good works within you, just as rain-drops form while falling, and fall as they form.'

Plainly such a doctrine drew an absolute line of cleavage between the realms of Nature and Grace. One was the sphere of 'things visible, though vain'; the other was the home of things real, and invisible no longer. Necessarily Port Royal turned from the first with loathing. 'The whole world lieth in wickedness,' Saint Cyran was fond of quoting from St. John. He added that therein the Apostle included all the perceptions of our senses, all the concepts of our reason, all the inclinations of the unregenerate heart. There was nothing free from sin, save the thoughts of Himself and His creatures that His Spirit wakened in our soul. From this standpoint Nature soon became one vast, unholy chaos, one shaking quagmire of corruption, in the midst of which rose, stark and lonely, the storm-swept citadel of Grace. 'All that is in the world,' cries Pascal, 'is lust of the eyes, or lust of the flesh, or the pride of life. Woe to the accursed land burnt up, rather than watered by these three rivers of fire. Happy they who find a sure anchorage in the stream, without being overwhelmed or swept away. They do not stand erect; they sit on a safe and humble seat, whence they do not rise before the time of light. Then they stretch out their hands to Him Who will deliver them, and cause them to stand upright in the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, where pride can no longer cast them down. And yet they weep—not at the sight of the

torrent washing away all transitory things, but at the thought of their dear country, Jerusalem Above, whose remembrance is ever with them through the long days of their exile. The waters of Babylon flow on, and fall, and carry away. O holy Sion! where all stands fast, and nothing falls.' [1]

At Port Royal such feelings reached a pitch of peculiar intensity. There, to the Puritan's horror of the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh was added the Catholic ascetic's dread of the 'world.' Jansenists were in an especial degree 'disciples of St. Augustine'; and he had done more than anyone else to materialise the contrast between the mystical Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this earth. Under his hands the *Civitas Dei* took visible shape in the organisation of the Catholic Church. Within the Church alone could righteousness be found; the world was its devilish counterpart, given over to all uncleanness, a habitation of bats and owls. Hence to cut off his flock from all sources of secular contagion became the first object of the Catholic reformer—Hildebrand with his clerical celibacy, St. Francis with his holy poverty, Savonarola with his bon-fire of Ghirlandaio's 'vanities,' St. Teresa with her mysticism. And in their steps walked Port Royal. There Saint Cyran laboured hard 'happily to depeople Earth, and give new citizens to Heaven' by driving his hearers into a convent. There, as Pascal said, Christians did not ask whether they felt a call to leave the world, but whether they had a vocation to stay in it. For the world was eaten up with the virus of Original Sin. 'With our first father fell we and all our race—nay, the whole world, and all that therein is. Thenceforward creatures are become the subjects, objects, instruments of sin. Over the souls of men it has swept like a flood, whereof the Flood in Holy Writ is no more than an image. . . . Although God made the world before the

[1] *Pens.* 458.

Fall, He made it knowing that sin would come ; and therefore He so appointed matters that our chief duty should consist in flying from it, in hating and destroying it, so far as in us lies.'

Tolerant moralists rub their eyes, and ask where Saint Cyran found the traces of this exceeding wickedness. But Saint Cyran denied the moralist's competence to pass judgment on such matters. Only those whose eyes had been opened by conversion could understand what was really meant by sin. No doubt, as Jonathan Edwards says, natural men were capable of loving good, and hating evil after a fashion of their own. But their hatred of sin was as their hatred of a serpent or a tiger ; righteousness they loved ' no otherwise than as the blackness of the soil is beautiful in the eyes of the farmer.' In short, their feelings towards virtue and vice depended altogether on self-interest, on the advantages accruing to their *Moi*. And the great lesson of the ' Augustinus ' was that the *Moi* ought to have no voice whatever in spiritual concerns. This lesson Jansen's disciples took all the more to heart, since the age of Richelieu had seen a great outburst of cultivated self-indulgence. French powers of industrial production went up by leaps and bounds. Luxuries, for which the greatest nobles had hitherto asked in vain, were brought well within the reach of a middle-class purse. Comfort became the order of the day ; and the gossiping Tallemant will detail its progress in domestic architecture, in travelling facilities, in the kitchen and the wardrobe. Men and women threw themselves with zest into the art of making the best of the good things of life. Many who were not Libertines unconsciously subscribed that article of the Libertine creed which ordered everybody to enjoy everything that could be enjoyed. ' We must open our hearts not only to fine gentlemen and fair ladies, but to all good things,' cries Théophile de Viau. ' I love a cloudless day, clear water, the sight of a mountain,

the sweep of a great plain. I love the sea, its calm, its ripples, and its shores. Also I love whatever makes a strong appeal to the senses: flowers and music, horses and hunting, rich clothing and good cheer. But, much as all these things delight me, I do not set my heart on one. Let a single passion take entire possession of our soul, and from pleasant dalliance it changes to fury and brutality.'

Here spoke the ethics of self-indulgence naked and unashamed. Théophile's closing caution was echoed by all the more responsible Libertines, for the most elementary prudence taught a certain economy of desire. Saint Évremond even insisted on a rigorous self-mastery. One of the first things a young man must learn was to keep his appetites well in hand, for fear lest to-day's debauch should spoil the enjoyment of to-morrow. Beyond this, his moral code did not go. Virtue resolved itself into the art of knowing which inclinations could be safely indulged, and to what degree. Pascal answered him in a sentence, 'Let those, who think that man's highest good lies in a carnal appetite, drink their fill, and die.' But very soon Pascal began to ask himself whether Saint Évremond's doctrine was peculiar to the Libertines. Did not many roads lead to the sty of Epicurus? What object had mankind at large, except to get from the world the best the world could give? Were even professed reformers always slaves of an ideal? When Méré reorganised the *salons*, when Richelieu reorganised the State, had they any object in view higher than securing the largest possible balance of pleasure over pain? 'Men have drawn from concupiscence excellent rules of justice, government, and morals. But, for all that, the evil root in man, the *figmentum malum*, is only covered; it is not purged away.' Soon all human society appeared to Pascal one vast conspiracy of selfishness, one huge, unholy mechanism for keeping the scales of happiness even by playing off one vice against another. And Newman, walking

in Pascal's footsteps, has described the uses made of one such vice by an irreligious modern culture. 'Pride is turned to account; it is given a new name; it is called self-respect, and ceases to be the disagreeable, uncompanionable quality which it is in itself. It is no longer a restless agent without definite aims; it has a large field of exertion assigned to it, and it subserves the social interests which it would otherwise trouble. It becomes the safeguard of chastity, the guarantee of veracity in high and low. It is the very household god of society, inspiring neatness and decency in the servant girl, propriety of carriage and refined manners in her mistress, manliness and generosity in the head of the family. It diffuses a light over town and country; it covers the soil with handsome edifices and smiling gardens; it tills the field; it stocks and embellishes the shop. It is the stimulating principle of providence on the one hand, and of free expenditure on the other. It breathes upon the face of the community, and the hollow sepulchre is forthwith beautiful to look upon.'

Some such feeling lay at the root of many a savage Jansenist attack on the 'splendid vices' of unregenerate man—notably of the Abbé Esprit's once famous 'Fausseté des Vertus Humaines,' where the 'chastity of Lucretia, the magnanimity of Alexander, the clemency of Titus, and the wisdom of Socrates,' are all traced back to vanity, diplomatic astuteness, or the happy accident of a generous heart. How could religion grow up out of such feelings? How could it live in an air so thick with the fumes of stale self-interest and self-indulgence? To breathe freely it must break away altogether from the past; it must be a creation out of nothingness, fitly ushered in by the miraculous birth-pangs of conversion. Grace brought the neophyte into a new world—a world so utterly unlike the old that it was difficult to convey an adequate idea of the difference between them. Pascal himself was driven back on a Cartesian

analogy. Descartes maintained that matter and mind, though juxtaposed, were wholly independent of each other. Matter was bound hand and foot by mechanical laws; mind went freely on its own way. Pascal answered that mind was just as much enthralled by the *Moi* as was matter by the laws of motion. Real freedom could only be won in a realm as independent of mind, as mind was independent of matter. And that was the mystical kingdom of charity, where were gathered together all those who loved God. 'The infinite gulf that lies between bodies and minds is but an image of the gulf, infinitely more infinite, that separates minds from charity. All the bodies in the Universe cannot produce one little thought: that is impossible, and belongs to another order. All the bodies and minds together cannot kindle one spark of charity: that is impossible, and belongs to another and supernatural order.' [1]

In other words, religious feelings differ entirely from all other feelings, both in origin and character. But how distinguish a truly religious feeling from its naturalistic counterfeits? Jonathan Edwards wrote a big book in answer to this question; it ends with a frank confession that there is no sure means of telling whether an affection is 'gracious' or not. Being raised very high is no sign. Fervour and fluency are no sign. Even great confidence is no certain sign. On the other hand, one thing is clear: affections plainly rooted in the *Moi* cannot possibly be gracious. A strong conviction of this truth lay at the bottom of Pascal's fight with the Jesuit casuists. These divines came into being at a time when almost all Europe had broken away from the Roman Church, and their first object was to tempt every sort and kind of person back within its fold. In the ardour of the chase they were far from squeamish about the means employed; when appeals to high motives were not successful, they were perfectly ready to make shift with

[1] *Pens.* 793.

low ones. *Primus in orbe deos fecit timor* might not be a lofty conception, but it was sound psychology enough; and indeed it is not only among Catholics that fear of hell fire has often made a Christian. Once get a sinner to realise that punishment always follows crime, and dread of the lash would stay his hand from wicked acts. Once dread of the lash had taken strong hold, reflexion would soon persuade him that his interests, both temporal and eternal, were best served by giving up the wish to offend. That done, the battle was over; the sinner was 'attrite,' and a fit subject for absolution. The miraculous power of the keys would then convert his decidedly self-seeking repentance into whole-hearted contrition.

To Pascal such a ladder of salvation seemed almost worthy of Mahomet's 'ridiculous Paradise of the senses.' But to the Jesuits its very grossness was its greatest recommendation. It was altogether free from the high-flying notions that puzzle and vex the average man. There was nothing in it that he could not understand, nothing that he felt to be beyond his powers. And the Jesuits were well aware that the best way of getting him to do things was only to ask him for so much as he knew himself to be capable of performing. Hence their energetic preaching of free will—that is, the doctrine that God was satisfied with whatever common sense thought it fair and reasonable that He should expect. Hence also came Pascal's repudiation of that doctrine. He denied that religion was in any way bound to take into account man's common-sense estimates of his own strength. Christianity demanded far more than his *Moi* could ever give; but it only did so, because irresistible grace furnished him with the needful powers. That being so, great things might fairly be required of those who, in the natural order, were weak and helpless indeed. *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis* was as much the motto of true Christians as it was abhorrent to the Jesuits. 'Talk to

the good Fathers, and you will soon discover that their lax moral standards are at the root of their opinions on grace. You will find that, knowing nothing of what Christian virtue means, they divorce it from the love of God, which should be its life and soul. You will see so many crimes glozed over, so much licentiousness excused, that it will not surprise you if they maintain the power of every man to lead what they fancy is a moral life. Their ideals being altogether heathen, the force of Nature amply avails to reach them. When we preach the need of efficacious grace we set its face towards a different goal. Grace is not content to cure one vice by another, or to make men practise the outward duties of religion; it aspires to virtues beyond the ken of heathen sage or Pharisee. Law and reason are sufficient graces for all that they require. But to wean our soul from the love of the world; to tear it from its dearest delights; to bind us wholly, only, and for ever to God can only be the work of an All-powerful Hand. It would be as idle to maintain that we can do this for ourselves as it would be idle to deny that we can reach the godless level which these good Fathers imagine to be Christian virtue.' [1]

But how persuade the world that holiness could only be reached by going through a conversion and entering the mystical kingdom of charity? Most men found great difficulty in understanding what Jansenism meant when it talked of the necessity of continually loving God. They argued that this was expecting the impossible; no one could keep his feelings always on the stretch or indulge in pious rhapsodies for ever. In vain Antoine Arnauld answered that loving God did not mean indulging in a series of 'passionate outbursts and ecstatic transports that come and go, which one remembers or forgets according as the fancy takes one.' The world only fell back on a second line of defence, and took refuge with Escobar and the casuists. These divines quite

[1] *Fifth Provincial Letter, Works*, i. p. 52.

agreed with Arnauld that passion, or *amour affectif*, was only an unimportant side of love; what really mattered was the *amour effectif* that bore fruit in good works. But they were perfectly ready to give this term a constructive interpretation. On the principle of 'If a man love Me, he shall keep My words,' they argued that a man loved God if he fulfilled the ordinary requirements of the Church, even if he did so without any express reference to his Maker. Was it, then, necessary *ever* to turn directly to Him? One intrepid casuist maintained that it was not; 'keeping the words' was enough, without any explicit affection at all. But this thesis was felt to be a too terribly logical *reductio ad absurdum*. Most casuists, as Pascal will presently explain, held that certain definite 'acts of love' were necessary; though they differed much amongst themselves as to the number of such acts required, and the best time for making them.

Arnauld made a gallant attempt to uproot this amazing legalism. The love of God, he said, in no way differed from any other kind of love. 'Let a man consult his heart; and, if he finds there a somewhat violent affection for his wife, his children or his friends, let him pay some attention to its movements, and he will soon discover what is meant by loving God.' But masters of households seldom relieve their feelings by periodical statutory declarations of affection for their wives and children; nor would their families be much gratified if they did. Why, then, suppose that 'formal acts of love' brought such great pleasure to the heavenly Father? 'How absurd it is to suppose that an evil-doer becomes in a moment a child of God, and worthy of a crown of righteousness because he goes through the form of telling his Maker that he is sorry for his sins. Repentance and love of God are not mere concepts of the reason: they are acts of will, inclinations of the heart towards its Object. Simply to tell God that we love Him, and to turn our thoughts towards Him, is no more than an intellectual exercise; nor will any

amount of honesty on our part avail to turn it into an act of love. The most it can claim to be is a token of our love to God, just as bowing to a man in the street is evidence of our friendship for him, but is not the friendship itself.' The casuists, accustomed to the legalism of the confessional, might rank the love of God as only one among the myriad duties of the Christian, standing scarcely higher than the obligation to go to church on Sunday, or to refrain from evil-speaking and strong drink ; Arnauld never wearied in asserting that it was the first and great commandment, on which hung all the Law and the Prophets, 'It is in God, and through Him that truth is true and justice just. Whatever we know of these two things springs from Him—as light springs from the sun, or branches from the trunk of a tree. Thus, when we say that men must love God perpetually, we mean that they must never slacken in the wish to follow the eternal laws of truth and justice. There is no moment in our lives when those laws do not demand from us one thing rather than another ; thus they enter into all our actions, even those which at first sight seem the most indifferent. To love those laws, and keep them faithfully, is what is meant by loving God.'

To Pascal this principle made an especial appeal. In old days at the Paris Club he had learnt to believe in the reign of universal law. But the Club held, as an article of faith, that Nature's ways were always simple. Bewilderingly complex as her effects might often be, research would show that the underlying cause could be expressed in a word. Pascal's own first performance was a striking act of homage to this doctrine. The originality of his youthful essay on conic sections lay in treating the most complicated ellipses as modifications of a perfectly simple figure. And later reflection only confirmed him in the belief that Nature manages everywhere to produce astonishingly variegated results by the use of exceedingly simple and unvarying

recipes. 'She diversifies and imitates: whereas artifice imitates and diversifies,' he wrote at the time when he was accusing the *Précieuses* of masking and disguising her face. Further, Pascal noticed a remarkable analogy between the mental and material spheres. 'Nature imitates herself,' he wrote. 'A seed falls on good ground, and bears; an idea falls on good ground, and also bears. All is the work of, and all is guided by, one Master—roots, branches, fruits, premises, conclusions.' But, if imitation was so universal a characteristic of the kingdom of Nature, was it likely to be altogether absent from the kingdom of charity? What if the whole Christian scheme of things was a mere 'imitation' of one central principle—if the Atonement, the Resurrection, the Church, the Sacraments, the Mass, were simply fruits and branches of the love of God? 'One thing alone is needful, but we love diversity. So God diversifies His one precept of charity, and contents our curious minds by a diversity, which always brings us back to the one thing needful.'[1]

That being so, the love of God must plainly be the one and only mainspring of all our thoughts and all our acts. 'Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all for the glory of God.' But how bring the whole life under the shadow of the Cross? How transform Antoine Arnauld's 'inclinations of the heart' into an over-mastering passion? What is an over-mastering passion? The professors answer that it is 'un drainage énergique, qui dessèche tout le reste de la vie au profit d'une seule tendance.' Asceticism is this draining-process applied with scientific rigour and completeness. Why cannot an average dweller in the world let himself be carried away by the current of a single emotion? Because his heart is torn asunder by a hundred conflicting interests. Asceticism, therefore, must come in to weed out all inclinations but one, and make him artificially callous to every other tie. 'Charity,' wrote Saint Cyran, 'is directly

[1] *Pens.* 670.

opposed to the nature of sin, and sin is rooted in the affection we bear to things of this earth. How, then, can we better serve God than by ruining one love by the other? Let us offer up to Him whatever we hold dear. Let us start at once to love Him as much as we love ourselves, and thenceforward trample down all we used to prize.' All we used to prize must go, because the love of God is jealous and can bear no rival near its throne. It has no mercy on the family ties—the social and professional interests—that to the non-mystical mind would seem the most natural of relationships; each of them is a certainly disturbing influence; a possibly dangerous counter-attraction. As well expect a soul aflame with the love of God to endure one or two relics of worldly affection, as ask a healthy body to endure one or two splinters in its flesh.

Thus asceticism became the natural complement to conversion. As Antoine Arnauld said: the new man is not born in a moment, any more than is the old; often the regenerate self must wage a long guerilla warfare with the relics of the *Moi*. Here came in ascetic practices, to check all return to former habits of thought. Fastings and hair-shirts did much more than 'keep the body in subjection' in a literal, physiological sense; by acting as a constantly recurring tax on the mind's store of nervous energy they prevented it from straying far from the 'one thing needful.' Towards the same end worked the ruthless Jansenist campaign against art and beauty. Puritanism can never be tender towards aesthetic sensibilities. Restlessness and change is the very law of their life; they cannot bear to keep their eyes for ever fixed on one monotonous reality: without an endless round of new excitements, their freshness and susceptibility grow stale. Hence at Port Royal they fell all and severally under the ban. Angélique Arnauld refused to have an organ in her convent-chapel, on the ground that only what is highest in us is fit to do God's service;

He asks for the homage of our will and reason, not for the cloying adulteration of our senses. Fontaine is careful to record that in the abbey-grounds at Port Royal no flowers were allowed to grow, 'except the virtues of the gardeners.' And Pascal was not speaking simply as a man of science when he poured scorn on the Argument from Design, and on apologists who 'proved God' by the course of the moon or the flight of birds. Such considerations might lead up to a shallow, sentimental Deism, not to the God of Christianity. What had birds and flowers to do with Him?

> It were a vain endeavour
> Though I should gaze for ever
> On that green light that lingers in the West;
> I may not hope from outward forms to win
> The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

But asceticism was much more than a mere measure of precaution. All Port Royal was fond of repeating the Augustinian dictum that love, alone of the passions, could never be idle; to manifest itself in action was a condition of its being. But how could the Jansenist show his love? How better than by self-imposed austerities? The Gospel came before the world as a religion of suffering; Saint Cyran was never tired of repeating that the martyr was the Christian writ large. All his torments bore witness to the triumph of the immortal spirit over the flesh, of its contempt for pain and death, for worldly pleasures and successes. But of all this asceticism was a vivid symbol, and something more besides. Fellow-suffering calls forth fellow-feeling with marvellous efficiency; thanks to his austerities, the humblest Jansenist could feel himself enrolled in the noble army of the saints. The death of Leonidas and his Spartan heroes left Pascal quite unmoved; but his heart went out towards 'our members,' the victims of Nero and Diocletian. Most of all was this true of the Prince of martyrs. 'Your sufferings,' wrote Angélique Arnauld to one of her nuns,

'are the most precious thing in your life, and the most important. Indeed, St. Paul seems to think that they alone are needful; since he says that those who suffer with Christ will also reign with Him.' Trivial and half-hearted though the nun's penances might be, was she not doing her best to 'fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ?' Small wonder, then, if at Port Royal austerities became inseparably bound up with irresistible grace. 'There are three ways of believing,' says Pascal, 'reason, custom, and inspiration. The Christian Church, which alone has reason on her side, only counts among her true children those who believe by inspiration. Not that she by any means disdains the help of the other two. Reason must open our minds to the truths of religion, and custom brings them home to us; but by humiliations we must invite the inspirations, which alone can bring about a firm and lasting result. "Lest the Cross of Christ be made of none effect."'[1]

[1] *Pens.* 245.

CHAPTER XV

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE STORM

Saint Évremond, the Libertine, was once asked what he thought about the Jansenists. He answered that they were an ecclesiastical analogue to the *Précieuses*. Both groups were made up of excellent persons born without the least sense of proportion. One frittered away over fine-drawn theological technicalities all the time the other wasted on equally small minutiae of language. Nor was curiosity about Port Royal confined to Saint Évremond's friends. Long before Pascal's second conversion the Jansenists had begun to make a certain stir in the world; and public opinion wanted to know exactly who they were and what they were about. Gossip was half inclined to write them down as no better than Protestants in disguise. In 1646 Angélique Arnauld reports that she and her nuns were thought to have given up Transubstantiation and the Invocation of Saints. A year later they had got as far as worshipping the sun; because, in rebuilding their convent-chapel, they followed the obsolete custom of making it face eastwards. By 1654 they were entering into a league with 'that horrible monster, Oliver Cromwell, the parricide of his king.' Gossip, however, was out of its reckoning. So far from making treaties with Cromwell, the one object of Port Royal was to cut away the ground under the feet of Protestantism by forcing reform on the Church of Rome. Such had always been the dream of Jansen and Saint Cyran,

both of whom began their careers as controversialists on the Catholic side. Jansen was a professor at Louvain, the frontier-citadel of Rome over against Presbyterian Holland. Saint Cyran had crossed many a sword with the Calvinists of Touraine, while chaplain to the Bishop of Poitiers, whose diocese included the famous Huguenot citadel of La Rochelle. Their polemical zeal they handed on to the younger generation at Port Royal. Antoine Arnauld denounced the Reformers as enemies of the human race. Pascal went out of his way to explain that even a Jesuit casuist was better than a Protestant.

Pascal's outburst rests on more than blind inherited prejudice. Between Port Royal and the Reformation ran a bridgeless gulf, for it expressly rejected justification by faith, the key-stone of the Protestant arch. Why was it the key-stone? Because the great controversies of the seventeenth century all turned on this question of justification. What made a sinner acceptable to God? Both parties agreed that it was grace. But how did grace reach him? Luther maintained that it came to him once and for all through faith; the Catholics held that it was instilled into him drop by drop through the sacraments. But sacraments imply a priesthood to administer them; and a priesthood presupposes a hierarchical organisation of the Church. Thus the Jansenists were as much committed to belief in these things as were the Jesuits themselves. Their strong conviction that the Church was honeycombed with abuses never shook their confidence in it as the fountain of sacramental grace. Hence to remain within its fold was of the last importance. In the thick of his Provincial Letters Pascal found time to write to Mlle. de Roannez that there were no greater zealots for Catholic unity under the Pope than 'those whom you call our party.' None the less, the Jansenists came much closer to Luther than they themselves suspected. What the Reformation attacked

was the view that sacramental grace was an *opus operatum*, a mysterious force working independently of the subject's knowledge. He might feel that it was stirring within him, or he might not; there was no necessity that he should. Hence he could never tell for certain where he stood; he could only trust blindly to the sacrament, and hope that all would be well in the end. Luther, on the other hand, started from the necessity of a 'comfortable assurance.' Unconscious justification was not enough; a man must *know* whether he was being saved. And this assurance grace brought him, when it awakened his heart to faith; for anyone could tell whether he had faith or not. Nor was it long before a man began to understand the how and the why of his faith; for its movements, unlike those of the *opus operatum*, were open to the eye. He could watch its ebb and flow, and discover what most increased its fervour. He no longer assumed *a priori* that any single rite must be the exclusive channel of salvation; the sacraments took their place beside other means of edification, prayer, sermons, Bible-reading. Each and every one of these was a blessing or a curse according as it helped or hindered faith. And whether it did the one thing or the other, who but the individual man could say?

Port Royal's real position was a modification of this stand-point. The Jansenists denied that a man could receive assurance once for all; hence they repudiated justification by faith. Equally they denied that he could live by the *opus operatum* alone; hence they insisted on the necessity of conversion. As Saint Cyran said, God must speak *once* to the soul as directly as He spoke to St. Paul on the road to Damascus. And, although they maintained both the Real Presence in the Eucharist and the validity of priestly absolution, they insisted that both sacraments should give some tangible assurance of their workings in the heart of the receiver. Thereby they came

into violent conflict with the prevailing spirit in their Church. Orthodox Catholicism denied the need of an assurance. It held that Christianity was essentially a Law —a code of doctrines to be believed, of duties to be done. This Law every reasonable being must feel that he had full power to perform. The Jansenists denied that men had any ground for this self-confidence. So far from feeling able to perform all the commandments of the Church they insisted that the characteristic mood of the Christian was a profound conviction of his inability to fulfil any precept at all. Hence the first duty of religion was not to lay down rules, but to cure the diseases of mankind. Thus, when Port Royal and its opponents spoke of faith, they had in view two very different things. To the Ultramontane Catholic faith meant essentially the acceptance of a Law ; to the Jansenist it meant the conviction that grace was making him whole.

Here lies the key to all Port Royal's quarrels with the Church of Rome. Jansen's great complaint against the theologians was their exaggerated intellectualism, their love of forcing spiritual truths into a logical strait-jacket. But the theologians were lineal descendants of the medieval schoolmen, and the schoolmen could not help themselves. As interpreters of the Law, their first duty was to be accurate ; and accuracy requires a man to be logical and precise, and deal in utterances as clear-cut as a proposition of Euclid. On the other hand, so long as he confined himself to legitimate deductions from the Law, a man was free to roam as he pleased over the whole field of knowledge ; and many schoolmen took full advantage of this licence to rove. Like clever children, they asked questions on every conceivable subject ; and, again like clever children, they insisted on having an answer, quite regardless of whether a serious answer was possible or not. But fixed convictions seldom thrive in

the purely interrogative mood ; and the more questions the schoolmen asked the clearer it became that many things theologically true were philosophically false. On what grounds, then, could they be defended ? Infallibility undertook to do what was beyond the power of reason ; for many of the later schoolmen the authority of the Pope was the only plank between faith and scepticism. Naturally the papal prerogatives were no losers by this result. But they gained immeasurably more when the Reformation diverted the stream of Catholic energy from speculative into controversial channels. Minute accuracy of dogmatic belief became even more important than before. Every doctrine must be defined with rigorous exactitude, and every moot point at once submitted to the Pope for judgment ; for in face of the Protestant enemy the Church must speak in no uncertain tones. Thus the Pope became a Court of Cassation, dealing with final appeals in prompt and businesslike fashion. Old-fashioned theologians had preferred a general council. But councils were slow, uncertain, hard to gather together ; whereas the Pope was always on the spot. Besides, he was generally a finished man of the world, and issues involving much more than theological scholarship were often on the carpet. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a religious opinion was a political event. To some extent, at least, the tastes of temporal sovereigns must be humoured ; it was not only at the Council of Trent that the Holy Ghost, as Father Sarpi said, had a way of arriving in the Spanish ambassador's mail-bag. Hence the desirability of leaving final decisions to Rome ; there the uncompromising logic of the theologians was sure of being tempered by tactful *Dogmenpolitik*.

From the imaginative standpoint, also, this concentration of all authority on a single pair of shoulders was a great step forward. Luther's revolt forced the Church of Rome to lay exaggerated emphasis on every point he

challenged; zealous Catholics were determined to be nothing that Protestantism was, and everything that it was not. The Reformers had taught—or been popularly supposed to teach—a 'right of private judgment' based on belief in individual inspiration. Ultramontanism retorted by hymning the praises of obedience, of submitting to authority, and never thinking for oneself. But how give these ideas a vivid, personal embodiment? The infallibility of the Church was too abstract to impress the generality of mankind; whereas the infallibility of the Pope had all the warmth and colour of a living fact. The Pope was accordingly exalted as the middle term between God and man. Truth streamed down from heaven on his head, and his head alone. From him it filtered through to the bishops, from the bishops to the priests; from the priests a thin jet trickled into the souls of the laity. Hence to set any limit whatever to the authority of the Pope was simply to bar up man's only channel of communication with his Maker. Theologians might distinguish between realms where he was actually infallible and realms where he was not; but common sense brushed aside their technicalities. On any question the mind could frame the Pope was a thousand times more likely to be right than anyone else.

Thus the great effort of Ultramontanism was to bring the whole of life under control of his authority, and thereby save men from the risk of thinking for themselves. Theology would tell them what to believe on every conceivable point. Casuistry would regulate every detail of their conduct with equal minuteness. No corner of existence must remain unswept, for the microbe of private judgment developed quicker than the plague. Let it germinate in a council-chamber or a study, and in a trice it had infected the well-springs of character. Hence Rome kept a jealous eye on the professors; as Pascal says, the Pope hates and

fears the learned men who are not bound to him by vow. Hence still greater jealousy of the statesmen ; if individuals might not think for themselves, why should governments or nations be allowed that privilege? During Pascal's youth France was thrown into a tempest of excitement by the publication of the ' De Schismate ' of the Jesuit publicist Santarelli. This most logical of Ultramontanes gave the Pope an absolute right of interference in the concerns of temporal sovereigns, whenever he thought that the interests of religion were in any way concerned. He could dictate their policy at home and abroad, revise their statute-book, upset the decisions of their law-courts. If they refused to listen, he could punish them in any manner he saw fit ; in the last resort he could depose them, release their subjects from their allegiance, and head a crusade of Catholic Powers against them. On the other hand, Santarelli and his colleagues by no means left the faithful layman without his *quid pro quo*. In return for his submissiveness, the Church undertook to deal with all his difficulties and doubts. It could always be trusted to tell him what to do, and what to believe ; and his whole responsibility, intellectual and moral, was limited to carrying out its orders. The fewer questions he asked, the safer he would be. Like all authoritative religions, Ultramontanism soon developed into a jungle of precedents and leading cases inaccessible to all but experts. Soon modest laymen shuddered at the very thought of drawing the simplest conclusion on their own account ; one step beyond their Catechism might plunge them into some recondite heresy.

> There 's a great text in Galatians,
> If you trip on it, entails
> Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
> One sure, if another fails.

It was so much easier and safer to make a general act of blind submission—to give, as Pastor Sabatier says, a blank

cheque to the hierarchy, and leave the priests to fill in the figures as they chose.

However orthodox this state of mind, it easily sank into the torpid vacuity of that traditional charcoal-burner, who told Luther that he believed whatever the Church believed. When Luther asked him *what* the Church believed, he answered that he had not the slightest idea. Hence *fides implicita* found small favour at Port Royal. The Jansenists might hold Luther's name in pious Catholic horror, but they believed as firmly as he did in the necessity of a living faith. And living faith could not be content with passive acceptance of propositions ; it demanded an explicit, active self-appropriation of spiritual truths. 'It is not enough,' said Luther, 'that a man believe that God is, that Christ has suffered, and such-like. He must steadfastly believe that God is *his* God for His blessedness, that Christ died and rose again for *him*.' But how bring this personal faith within reach of all the world? Plainly by showing that religion was a simpler thing than the Ultramontanes pretended. The worthy Cistercian monk, Dom Jouand, was horrified to hear Saint Cyran declare scholasticism worse than useless as a training for divines. 'Give me,' he said, 'a dozen of your novices young enough for their minds to be virgin soil, and quite untainted by the logical fever. I warrant I will turn them out excellent theologians in six months.' Genuine religious knowledge only came to those who bore in mind the warning of St. Paul against 'perverse disputings of corrupt men doting about questions and strifes of tongues.' Thus everyone could read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the truths of faith. No one could escape by pleading that he was ignorant and a layman. 'They do great honour to Nature,' said Pascal, 'who teach her that she can talk about everything, even about theology.' [1]

But how ensure that Nature would 'talk' both independently and rightly? Jansenists answered with their

[1] *Pens.* 29.

doctrine of irresistible grace. They maintained that conversion awakened in the heart an infallible touch-stone of truth; this was the 'spiritual sense' of Jonathan Edwards, the faculty that showed the way to the centre of the earth more exactly in a moment than the ablest mathematician could determine in a whole day. Thus the young Duke of Roannez once naïvely explained that he could generally tell in a minute whether a thing was wrong, though the reason why it was so often took him a long while to discover. Pascal answered that this was putting the cart before the horse; men would never cast about for reasons, unless some feeling of wrongfulness were already in their mind.[1] And this feeling was the voice of spiritual sense, speaking directly into the heart, instead of mediately through a casuist. 'They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, saying Know the Lord,' quotes Pascal from the Hebrew Prophet, 'for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord. I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their heart.' Hence Christians need not be afraid of trusting to a blind and formless intuition. 'Reason moves slowly under the weight of so many principles and so many points of view—none of which may be left out of sight for a moment—that it is for ever falling asleep or going astray. Such is not the case with feeling. It acts in a flash, and is always ready to act. Let us, then, put our trust in feeling; otherwise we shall never know our own minds.'[2]

To his Catholic critics Pascal's trust in intuition seemed worthy of a mad-house. 'The Jansenists,' wrote the scoffing Jesuit Pirot, 'promise to bring men to a state where the Holy Ghost will tell them every moment what their duty is, and give them a victorious grace to do it. For their vanity must needs aspire to extraordinary paths far above reason, which is the element of casuists and schoolmen. This is one of the illusions by which the devil leads

[1] *Pens.* 276. [2] *Pens.* 252.

fanatics astray. So did Calvin before them; and it is to this fatal experience that we owe the loss of so many of our brethren.' Father Pirot's controversial zeal, however, led him to exaggerations. Had the Jansenists really gone as far as he supposed in the direction of 'enthusiasm,' they must have thrown in their lot with Quietism, already in Pascal's time a growing form of faith, although Mme. Guyon and Molinos were still to come. For the Quietists really believed that they had reached a state where the Holy Ghost would tell them every moment what their duty was. They thought that they had slipped away from finite limitations altogether to the broad bosom of infinity; there they could fold their hands in dreamy meditation, and wait till inspiration came. But Quietism found little favour at Port Royal. Jansenism was too robust a creed to feel the charm of its 'soft and savoury sleep of nothingness'; and Saint Cyran condemned its attempts to escape from the finite as at once craven, illusory, and selfish. They were craven because God called on man to stay and fight with Nature a battle fiercer than ever Greek or Roman hero waged. They were illusory because the white radiance of Eternity was not for our purblind sight. Between God and us must hang Creation, as a kind of nebulous envelope veiling the sunshine from our eyes. 'By a strange marvel God is mingled with His creatures and yet separable from them, just as in the day-time light mingles with the air, but withdraws again at the setting of the sun.' Lastly, the Quietist escape was selfish, because it meant neglect of our neighbour. Quietism thought little of philanthropy, and indeed inclined to the opinion that one moment's mystic contemplation was worth a thousand years' good works. Saint Cyran answered that God had again and again declared it enough, if men loved each other for His sake. 'It is as though He would leave all the outward benefits of charity to them, and keep nothing for Himself beyond the

bare acknowledgment of the reason and the intention of the heart. . . . Perfect holiness is not reached till He becomes the End of all the actions of His servants, more especially in those business and money matters which so many find such good excuses for neglecting. Unless you pay your debts—and that punctually, as the Scripture bids—you can expect no favours from Jesus Christ. For God is readier to pardon sins against Himself than sins against our neighbour.'

But how conciliate a strong attachment to the virtues of the active life with an equally strong belief in individual inspiration? How keep a man always on the watch for thunder-claps of grace, and at the same time make him unremitting in the discharge of daily duty? How embolden him to go forward, when spiritual sense was silent for the moment? Jansenism answered that God had two methods of operation. Sometimes the voice of spiritual sense was unmistakable, decisive; at other times 'Grace hid itself under Nature,' and left the Christian to fight his way through doubts and difficulties to a conclusion, just as unregenerate men must do. No doubt, as Pierre Nicole will explain, God would have let us know His will directly, had He not thought it better for our character to buy that knowledge at the price of a struggle. We must carefully prepare ourselves; we must wrestle with our conscience; we must often be attacked by scruples. At least, we seem to do these things; but Nicole goes on to explain that, seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, they appear in a very different light than when viewed through spectacles of space and time. We think we prepare ourselves; really God prepares us. We think we struggle, really He inspires us. Only the scruples are our own, because it is part of His plan to leave us sometimes to ourselves, the better to make us realise our weakness and the strength of grace. Thus spiritual sense was sometimes a directly informing, sometimes a merely bracing

force. Saint Cyran and Pascal laid most stress on its first characteristic; its second was most in favour with Nicole and the men of caution. For it was, perhaps, to cautious minds that spiritual sense made the strongest appeal. Thanks to it, the most circumspect might take courage to act up to what he knew was best in himself, to take whatever road he found would bring him most refreshment and strength from God, without caring whether his conduct squared with an external rule of logical or theological correctness.

Thus spiritual sense lay at the root of Jansenist manly independence. The early struggles of the Paris Club have shown how desperately hard men found it to stand up for their own opinion against authority, even when they felt quite certain that authority was wrong. And if this was hard in science, how much harder was it in a religion officered by Ultramontanes. On the other hand, the belief that 'Nature is able to talk about everything, even about theology,' soon developed into the doctrine that she ought to talk about theology, and was failing in her duty if she did not. It might be easier and safer to give in to the authoritative principle, and keep step with the crowd; but Port Royal held that the difficulties and dangers, which beset an individual search for truth, were meant by God to play a most valuable part in the building up of a Christian character. Hence its great anger with the Jesuits; for these offered to relieve men's consciences of all responsibility whatever, beyond applying to set cases a ready-made casuistical code warranted to meet all needs. And what the Jesuits did with morality, that the French Bishops did with dogma. In place of hard personal strivings after truth, they offered cheap, mechanical substitutes from Rome. 'Only self-indulgence,' wrote Nicole, 'could think that there is no sin in prompt obedience to authority. Men naturally love certainty, and like to see their path marked

out beyond all possibility of mistake. But the light of faith teaches that God pays no regard to this human inclination. He thinks it better that we should travel along a precisely opposite path—a path of darkness, doubt, and fear—whereby we are kept ever trembling and humiliated in His Presence, and dependent on His light and help.'

Perhaps these endeavours to prove the spiritual virtues of conflict somewhat overshot the mark. Port Royal's God was a *Deus absconditus*, Who revealed His will in sudden, unexpected flashes. The Christian was like a traveller slowly groping his way forwards through banks of fog and mist. No doubt spiritual sense was always there to guide him; but the brighter shone the pillar of fire immediately above his head, the more the surrounding landscape was wrapped in sullen darkness. No wonder that the Jansenist's heart often sank within him. 'During this life,' wrote Martin de Barcos, nephew of Saint Cyran and long a confessor at Port Royal, 'we are indeed in evil case. We do not know exactly where we stand, nor can we ever be quite sure of our own thoughts or actions; often we must look suspiciously on those that seem the best. I think that is why this life is called the shadow of death, for we walk enveloped in a cloud big with threatenings of destruction. Here our only rule can be *exultare cum timore*, to rejoice, but not without a shudder. Fear without trust, and trust without fear, are alike unworthy of a Christian.' Thus most Jansenists spent their lives in a regular ebb and flow of moods. One moment they took Pascal's advice, and 'put their trust in feeling.' The next moment they called to mind his warning that men often mistake their fancy for their heart, and began feverishly to search for some external guarantee of truth. Yet a minute later, they remembered that this was giving way to self-indulgence, and fell back again on spiritual sense.

Some relief from these scruples was found in the practice

of direction of conscience. The seventeenth century was an age of directors, alike in Protestant countries and in Catholic. Pious men and women felt that something more than routine religious duties was expected from them, but they mistrusted their power to lead an ' interior life ' without assistance from an expert. Hence the use of a director. He kept flightiness from trying dangerous experiments, and broke up the bread of doctrine into morsels suited to a feeble appetite. Soon his authority became immense; and it was seldom the fault of his flock if he failed to magnify his office. Obedience to his commands was proclaimed itself a means of holiness, quite apart from the opportunity it gave of profiting by his wisdom. More than one writer of the age hints that a narrow-minded, unreasonable director was better than a good one, as giving his penitents more chance of showing their praiseworthy submissiveness. Jansenism was too virile a creed to fall into an error so typically Libertarian, so characteristic of the softer sex. In Saint Cyran's hands direction became a wholly ' maieutic ' art. The confessor's business was to help men to draw out what was best in themselves, and thus ultimately fit them to become their own directors. ' Our rule in direction,' wrote Saint Cyran to a lay correspondent, ' is not our own spirit, but the Spirit of God moving in the souls under our charge. He is far more our Director than we are yours. Our one wish is to go forward with Him, under Him, and in His strength, paying particular attention to such inspirations of Grace as it may please Him to reveal to us in you. For our task is not to build up with our own hands a tower reaching from earth to heaven, but to build up by the Hand of God a tower reaching from heaven to earth.'

Thus the director was no autocrat, and timorous Jansenists, who dared not stand altogether alone, must look elsewhere for their external oracle. For a while they thought they had found it in an almost slavish adherence

to the letter of Revelation. They clung to what they knew to be certain, and refused to take a single step forward without direct warrant from on high. 'In case we hearken to Port Royal,' writes the Jesuit Nouet, 'we shall have nothing but articles of faith in speculative divinity, canons and indubitable rules in morals, infallible aphorisms in physic, demonstrations in philosophy.' Applied to practical questions of conduct this tendency spelt rigorism. Worldlings might interpret the Law of God on the analogy of a human statute, and argue that what was not expressly forbidden was implicitly allowed. Pascal answered that the only difference between what the casuists called a 'permitted pleasure' and an open sin was that God certainly misliked the second, and only probably misliked the first. But still more fiercely did he turn on the casuists themselves. 'All other sects and religions take natural reason for their guide. Christians stand alone in this: that they are bound by the traditions which Jesus Christ left with their fathers to be handed on to them. But such bondage irks these reverend gentlemen. They must be free to follow their fancy, like the rest of the world.'[1] Thus antiquity became the watchword of Port Royal. Even with irresistible grace at his back the boldest reformer dare not stand altogether alone: least of all when he is reforming a historical religion. But the 'traditions of his fathers' enable him to speak with authority. Thus Fontaine draws a graphic picture of the spiritual unrest of his time. On every side Jesuit charlatans were swarming in with 'new lights of devotion, new patent devices for saving mankind, without the trouble of obeying the Gospel or following the commandments of their Saviour. With the same pertinacity dabblers in mysticism put forward magnificent theories of perfection evolved from their own subtle fancy. But M. de Saint Cyran had no such super-eminent way to

[1] *Pens.* 903.

propose. All he did was to follow the Gospel and the Fathers, and hand on to others what these divine masters had taught him.' It would be idle to inquire whether his debt to the Fathers was quite as great as he imagined, whether he did not bring to them more than he carried away. At Port Royal the primitive Church was more than a mere historical fact; it was a golden vision in the clouds, standing scarcely closer to realities than does Pietro Laurati's great fresco in the Campo Santo at Pisa to the daily life of the Thebaid. Then men were altogether unlike the subjects of Louis XIV. Then, as Pascal says, they considered world and Church as two deadly foes. 'Then they left one side when they joined the other. They forsook the principles of the one when they adopted those of the other. They quitted, they renounced, they forswore the world into which they were born, and gave themselves wholly to the Church where they received their second birth.'

This constant preoccupation with antiquity was fraught with no small danger. A small band of earnest reformers is always prone to exaggerate its own points of difference from the world at large; nor is this tendency diminished by assiduous study of the 'Acts of the Martyrs' or the Lives of the Fathers of the Desert. Antiquity for antiquity's sake became the motto of the weaker brethren at Port Royal. Primitive customs were revived just because they were picturesquely mildewed and forgotten. To the great entertainment of the unregenerate, Duhamel, the hare-brained rector of St. Maurice's in Paris, revived the ancient discipline of public penance, with its attendant ritual of candles and white sheets. And what was mere affectation in Duhamel became a serious vice in the tremulous Martin de Barcos. What attracted him in the Early Church was its minute regulation of the whole life of its members; and in a restoration of its elaborate discipline his troubled soul hoped to find security at last. Having succeeded to his

uncle's preferment he left Port Royal, and settled down at Saint Cyran. There he revived the Rule of St. Benedict in all its pristine severity down to the smallest details. He made each of his monks cook his own dinner, and tore down the partition-walls between their cells. When young Du Fossé from Port Royal went to see him, Barcos took his visitor round the place, stopping every now and then to point out how much better things were managed at Saint Cyran than at Port Royal. There everyone lived exactly as he pleased ; here every word, every action, almost every thought was minutely prescribed beforehand. These continual aspersions roused the loyal young hermit into something like a fit of temper. He admitted that there was nothing at Port Royal to hinder a man from giving free rein to his whims. But he urged that those who did so broke through the great principle of M. de Saci, which was that each hermit should keep strictly to the rule of life he had drawn up for himself in the sight of God, since nothing but free obedience to a self-imposed law could bear him satisfactory witness that he was following God, and not his own imagination.

This 'great principle of M. de Saci' proved amply sufficient, until Jansenism began to make a noise in the world. A new religious departure soon becomes the rallying-point of spiritual eccentrics and cranks, all of whom are exceedingly apt to 'mistake their imagination for their heart.' Thus Fontaine declares that 'guiding himself by his own vain fancies, under pretext that they came to him in prayer,' was the root-error of Jean Labadie, the great apostate from Port Royal, who left the Jesuits for the Jansenists, the Jansenists for Presbytery, and ended his restless career by founding an independent Pietist sect in Holland. His fall was a perpetual reminder to Port Royal that spiritual sense was not enough of itself ; its deliverances must be endorsed by an authority altogether independent of the ebb and flow of feeling. And for that authority they looked to the Church.

As Pascal says, it must teach, and God inspire, both of them infallibly. The two must work in harmony, for neither sufficed alone. The Church must be there to guard the dry bones of dogmatic fact; the Monitor within must clothe the skeleton with flesh. 'Besides the outward revelation of God's will to men,' wrote an English contemporary of Pascal, 'there is an inward impression of it on their minds and spirits, which is in a more special manner attributed to God. He alone can so shine upon our glassy understandings as to beget in them a picture of Himself. Thus it is He alone that acquaints us with the truths of Revelation. Men may teach the grammar and rhetoric, but God teaches the divinity.' [1]

Such a position was tenable enough so long as the two authorities worked in concert. But what was to happen if they differed—if grammar and rhetoric said one thing, and divinity another? The Jansenists were soon brought face to face with this dilemma. In 1649—three years after Pascal's first conversion—the Sorbonne, or Faculty of Divinity of Paris University, condemned five propositions from the 'Augustinus,' all dealing with irresistible grace. This censure, backed by the signatures of eighty-five bishops, was sent up to Rome for confirmation; and in 1653—eighteen months before Pascal's second conversion—Innocent X declared all five propositions heretical. All was now lost if the Ultramontanes were right and the reigning Pope was the sole depositary of truth; as Pascal said, every time the Jesuits caught him unawares they would make Christendom swear to a lie. But if the fortunes of Christendom did not stand or fall with the vagaries of Innocent X? 'The Church,' answered Antoine Arnauld, 'has often been compared to a river, and a river is one and the same from first to last. But as we learn little of its course from only watching it at one point, so we ought not to judge the Church merely by her present state; for these

[1] See Campagnac's *Cambridge Platonists* (Oxford, 1901), p. 182.

are the days of her old age and decrepitude: according to St. Gregory—of her sunset and decline, in the opinion of St. Bonaventure. We must go back to the Fountain-head, Jesus Christ, and descend from His times to our own through the Apostles and Prophets, who have been the purest channels of the stream.'

Thus the Jansenists fell back on the traditional refuge of the Catholic reformer; from the Church as it was they appealed to the Church as it should be. Such an attitude would be impossible within the modern Church of Rome; but in the seventeenth century Catholic discipline had by no means reached its present pitch of perfection. Another two hundred years must go by before Pius IX could declare that he alone was the Church. Great uncertainty then prevailed in France as to the value of a papal judgment. Italy was looked on as a country of great and sudden changes, where black in a moment turned to white, and one Pontificate might undo the work of another. Well might zealous Jansenists imagine that victory might yet be theirs. Innocent X might be hoodwinked by the Jesuits, but a truly Catholic Pope would one day shake off their bondage; and men must learn to wait in patience, until the present tyranny was overpast. Such was the meaning of Pascal's famous outburst, uttered when his Provincial Letters were condemned at Rome: 'Ad tuum tribunal, Jesu, appello.' He was not following in the steps of Luther; he was only 'looking to the day when there will come a Pope who will listen to both parties, and consult antiquity to do justice.' Meanwhile to gain time was the first essential. Profiting by the fact that the incriminated propositions were not textual extracts from the 'Augustinus,' Antoine Arnauld denied that Jansen fell under the papal censure. When the authorities replied that he did, Arnauld, who had been bred to the Bar, set up the common legal distinction between law and fact. He admitted that the Church was certainly infallible, so long

as it contented itself with laying down abstract propositions of divinity; but its infallibility ceased so soon as it began to apply those propositions to particular cases. Why this should be so Pascal will explain in his Provincial Letters. The Church must be infallible in the abstract, because to determine truths of faith passes all human understanding; it may be fallible in the concrete, because a man only needs the use of his eyes to discover whether certain propositions are contained in a particular book. Nor did Pascal hesitate to point his moral by references to Galileo and other cases where papal decisions on points of fact had come into disastrous conflict with science. 'Pope Zacharias did not put an end to the New World when he excommunicated St. Virgil for believing in the Antipodes. The King of Spain did well to put more trust in Christopher Columbus, who had been there, than in a Pontiff who had not.'

These ominous words once uttered, Pascal turned to follow his leaders into their temporising policy. That he should have done so is as little surprising as that he should have afterwards changed his mind, and condemned the distinction of law and fact as an unworthy subterfuge. He was a new recruit to the party; he was no theologian; he was not even a resident at Port Royal. Small wonder if he failed at once to realise how completely the question of grace dwarfed all other issues. Controversies seldom follow a strictly logical order; often the consequence is discussed at length before the first principle emerges into light. Such was the case at Port Royal. In 1643—only three years after the publication of the 'Augustinus'—Antoine Arnauld brought out a 'Treatise on Frequent Communion,' which for the moment threw Jansen's book into the shade. For a while discussions on grace were much less to the fore than wrangles over the management of the confessional; and the Jesuit casuists supplanted the Jesuit theologians as the chief target of Jansenist attack.

CHAPTER XVI

ESCOBAR

Just before his death, Saint Cyran declared that he left behind him twelve men stronger than himself. History played his prophecy false, for none of his official lieutenants had a tithe of his religious genius. Only in one respect did they surpass him. He had been anything but lucid, whereas Antoine Arnauld possessed one of the clearest brains in France. A consummate theologian, he was also a geometer of repute, and had philosophy enough to be a correspondent of Descartes. In short, he was one of those men who gain a reputation for knowing everything that can be known. Contemporaries called him *le grand Arnauld*; and although his books have been long forgotten, the shadow of his fame still lingers in Boileau's tribute to the memory of 'le plus savant des mortels qui jamais ait écrit.' And a still more impressive epitaph is furnished by the same satirist's repartee to Malebranche. When the philosopher complained that Arnauld never saw his points, Boileau asked *whom* he expected to understand him, if M. Arnauld could not do so. A clear head was all the more welcome, since the time had come for 'understanding'—that is, for Port Royal to put its case before the world. Jansen had written only for theologians, Saint Cyran only for recluses: what was the message of their party to humanity at large? Antoine Arnauld answered the question with his 'Treatise on Frequent Communion.' This was an

elaborate attack on the priests who gave absolution easily, without due inquiry into their penitent's character or the sincerity of his repentance. 'The new man is not born in a moment, any more than is the old. He is engendered little by little: often a long while must go by, before he sees the light. Let confessors, then, take anxious heed lest their precipitancy end in a miscarriage; and God overwhelm them with the reproach that He would bring against a mother who wished to be delivered of the fruit of her womb as soon as she felt herself with child.'

The 'Treatise' made its author one of the best-known men in France. It dealt with the management of the confessional, a point of interest to everyone. It was admirably written; the Jesuit Rapin, a critic of weight, had nothing but praise for its style. No wonder that, in days when a taste for reading was general, but novels and newspapers scarcely existed, it had almost as great a vogue in the drawing-rooms as in the studies of the learned. Not that everyone approved it. In 1643 France was in the throes of a great ecclesiastical revival. It was the age of St. Vincent de Paul, patron saint of practical philanthropists. The air was thick with orphanages and hospitals, with Sisterhoods of Charity, with schemes for evangelising the country districts and training the inferior clergy. But practical philanthropists seldom escape a touch of superficiality. They may be content with little, with small profits and quick returns; but a brisk turn-over they must have. Like a certain school of social reformers, they are apt to measure progress by examination-papers and statistics. Outward marks of religious profession bulk unduly large in their eyes, and they are more than a little impatient of those who insist on distinguishing carefully between the kernel and the husk. When the 'Frequent Communion' appeared, St. Vincent and his followers broke out into loud complaints. Had not the number of com-

municants in Paris churches diminished by half since Antoine Arnauld took to denouncing those who 'ate and drank to their own damnation?'

Nor was this feeling in evidence among the philanthropists alone. In 1643 Catholicism was still engaged in winning back its ancient empire in France. The embers of Protestantism were not yet altogether quenched; the disorders born of the Wars of Religion were by no means altogether removed. But a struggling Church seldom underrates the virtue even of a purely external acceptance of its ministrations. Catholics of the grosser type felt that they were already half-way towards heaven by the mere fact of being Catholics, and therefore sole heirs to means of grace and forms of worship ordained by God Himself. Theirs was, as Pascal said, the spirit of the 'carnal Jews,' who thought that God loved them because they were the seed of Abraham, or because He had given them a Temple and a Law, and suffered them to wash away their sins in the blood of beasts. As though Deuteronomy taught a different lesson from the Gospel of St. John. As though there could be titles to God's Love other than a broken and a contrite heart. But Pascal's views were little in favour with the militant theology brought into favour by the Jesuits. He had every right to treat this famous Order as synonymous with 'carnal Catholicism'; for although many Jesuits were not carnal, and many carnal Catholics were not Jesuits, the Society furnished the high-Catholic party with three-quarters of its zeal, its courage, and intelligence. Not that it was the patentee of any new invention. The 'mystery of Jesuitism' is a phantom born of heated Protestant brains. The Jesuits had no secret more abstruse than that of giving up to party what was meant for mankind with a ruthlessly heroic completeness unparalleled in history. They were called into being to save the Church at a dark crisis in its fortunes. They made the saving of the Church the one

object of their lives. In the salvation of the Church they found complete and perfect satisfaction. In return, they cut their own characteristics deeply on the Church at large. Yet the completeness of their triumph proved its own undoing. The 'Divina Commedia' never forgot to distinguish between the Church, as a mystical ideal, and the Church, as an earthly corporation. The King's daughter though all-glorious within, was often travel-stained enough without. But the whole spirit of the Jesuits cried out against this separation of ideals from actualities. Campaign indomitably they would, but they must know exactly for what they were campaigning. As their battle-standard they much preferred a strip of tangible silk to the most resplendent Constantine's vision in the clouds. Hence their anxiety to find flesh and blood equivalents for mystical ideas. The Bride of Christ must be identified with the reigning hierarchy at Rome; and men must feel that they were equally fighting God's battles, whether they fought for the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ or the temporal policy of the Pope.

But how persuade an honourable and intelligent conscience to confound the outward with the inward? Jesuitism answered by sweeping away the difference between them. It argued that the whole duty of man was to do the will of God. If He laid a certain work upon me, I must perform that action, and no other. In itself, my task might seem 'higher' or 'lower' than that assigned to my neighbour; but this distinction was of no moment. Neither action drew its meritoriousness from any intrinsic quality of its own, but simply from its conformity with the will of God. But how was a man to know for certain what God expected from him? Let him join the Society, and he would soon find out. There a perpetual ladder of communication ran between earth and heaven. The individual Jesuit obeyed his Superior, who obeyed the Rector, who obeyed the

Provincial, who obeyed the General, who obeyed the Pope, who took his orders straight from God Almighty. Thus obedience became the pivot of the Jesuit system, although it was far from being a Jesuit invention. Ever since the days of St. Benedict it had ranked, together with poverty and chastity, as one of the cardinal virtues of monasticism; and even Loyola's famous simile, *perinde ac cadaver*—like a carcase in the hands of the Superior—comes from the Franciscans. But in the Society obedience soon cast its companion virtues into the shade. 'We heard comparatively little of poverty or chastity,' writes a former novice, 'but every hour of the day we were reminded of obedience. No boundaries were set to this virtue; it was infinite space for ever enlarging.'

God and obedience, in fact, became convertible terms. Loyola would call a priest from the altar in the middle of Mass, because obedience was better than sacrifice. He disliked hearing a saint praised for his power of prayer; the test of sanctity was mortification, and mortification meant obedience. But his genius reaches its highest point in the 'Exercitia Spiritualia,' a series of meditations lasting many days. They carry the neophyte through the whole cycle of Christian history, making him realise each scene with the most vivid exactitude. He must be present when the Spirit of God first moved upon the face of the waters; he must stand by the cross of Jesus; he must taste the joys of heaven, and be scorched by a blast from the flames of hell. At first sight it seems as though experience were being allowed the fullest play; really it is being forced to put a rope round its own neck. The novice does not work through the exercises on his own account; they are administered by an expert, who keeps him under strict surveillance. He must not swerve a hair's breadth from the appointed list of subjects; he must not vary their order; nor may he spend on any one more or less than the appointed time. If he is in

the heights of heaven, back he must come to earth ; if he is in the depths of hell, there he must remain until the clock strikes. For the business of the exercises is to teach him to switch his mind on or off sacred subjects at the word of command, and thus bring the mainspring of his piety under the control of obedience.

Add to this a ceaseless drill in studies and recreations, in carriage of the body, even in diet and dress. Nor was obedience limited to carrying out orders already given. Above mere obedience in deed came the will to obey ; while highest of all was obedience in judgment and insight—*obedientia oculata*—which did the Superior's will without waiting for his nod. Thus did Loyola give a new meaning to his favourite psalm : ' Like as the eyes of a maiden wait on the hand of her mistress, so do our eyes wait on the Superior.' Necessarily his authority was absolute. Novices were forbidden to ask whether he was wise or foolish, holy or imperfect ; they were only to consider in him ' the Person of Jesus Christ, Who had put His authority into his hands, and would not suffer His minister to err.' Critics have sometimes asked whether this *perinde ac cadaver* included obedience to orders felt to be sinful. Loyola himself forestalled the objection. If a Jesuit had scruples about the morality of a command, he was to lay them before the Superior, and do his best to rest content with the Superior's explanations. If his conscience still proved restive, two or three colleagues were to be called in to arbitrate. If he could not be satisfied with their award, he was ' very far from the perfection which the life of religion demands.' This master-stroke of compromise secured a double triumph. The novice was saved from having to act against his conscience ; he was also saved from having to act on its authority alone.

This intense mistrust of ' private judgment ' was natural enough in a protagonist of the Counter-Reformation. But,

quite apart from sinister associations with Luther, it could offer small attractions to a converted Spanish officer. It is necessarily tentative; and a soldier cannot wait while spiritual experiments are being tried. He must have his orders ready-made, and take their truth for granted: 'not his to reason why.' Then too, experience had convinced Loyola that most human weaknesses and errors spring from independent thought. The burden of deciding important questions for himself puffs one man up and casts another down. Often both evils lodge in the same brain. Experience makes its votaries moody and self-conscious, prone to sudden variations. One moment finds them sanguine to extravagance, another casts them into depths of unintelligible despair. Over this point they are more certain than certitude itself; the next may strike them with an ague of paralysing scruples. Such a temper of mind was not for Loyola, most resolute of utilitarians. As he said, he meant his Jesuits to be like the good angels, who need think no more about their own souls, but could afford to put out all their powers in the service of their neighbour. Doubts and scruples must accordingly be cut down at the root. The man of experience often found it harder to know what his duty was than to do it. Loyola resolved to spare his children the pain of this responsibility. Whatever troubles fate might have in store for the Jesuit, that of having to rely on his own conscience should never be among them.

Still, everything could not be foreseen, and there might be moments when no Superior was at hand. How shield the novice at such junctures from having to depend on himself? How protect him from his own experience? The answer was simple enough. Experience relies on the heart, on intuition and spiritual sense. To checkmate it, nothing more was needed than to estop all reference to these lords of shiftless misrule. Loyola accordingly called casuistry to

his assistance. Not that this was his own invention, any more than was obedience. Its history stretches through the Middle Ages back to stray germs in the Fathers ; Jesuit wits more than once turned the tables on Port Royal by bringing up lax casuistical dicta from Augustine himself. But the medieval 'Summae de Poenitentia' were heavy, ill-digested treatises, not unlike the Year-books of old Westminster Hall; clearness and order only came in with the casuists of the Counter-Reformation. Of these the great majority were Jesuits ; and most of them came from Italy or Spain—the two countries least alive to the spirit of the Reformation. They made casuistry into a deliberate rival to spiritual sense. It became the art of deciding questions of conscience by logical deduction from a general rule. The Church laid down certain infallible moral principles ; and a man's business was to apply these to his own case, in the same way as a judge applies the appropriate Act of Parliament to the case before him. In such a process there was no more room for the heart than there is in algebra. This elimination of the feelings brought certainty within the reach of everyone. To consult the heart was both risky and laborious, as Jansenists were the first to acknowledge; whereas about the judgments of reason there could be no mistake. Only put an undivided trust in logic, and the whole problem of conduct became as clear and simple as the noon-day sun.

Nor was certainty the only gain. Experience is necessarily coloured by every kind of personal peculiarity; but reason is nothing, if not universal. It speaks in the same tones to every man ; what is true for one, is true for all. Hence it can promise uniformity ; and to Loyola's military mind uniformity appeared no trivial blessing. The very first official publication of his Society was the 'Directorium,' a manual for its confessors, showing how all of them could use the same methods with penitents of every class and

country. Nor was this so hard a feat. Once get morality to abstract away from differences of individual character, and it can easily be worked up into a system as comprehensive and precise as any code of law. Once train up young zealots in a system, and it soon possesses them entirely ; they no more wish to look beyond it than Jacqueline Pascal's *précieux* friends at Rouen wished to look beyond their theories of the poetic art. Nor is average humanity insensible to the charms of system—least of all, when system condescends to give its reasons. A clever layman was perfectly free to go through a casuistical argument, and pick holes in it if he could. But saying that he might go through the argument was by no means saying that he must. The truths of casuistry, being universal, could be settled once for all ; once the experts had pronounced, it was generally sheer waste of time to insist on re-opening a matter. Besides, few laymen had the requisite skill. In the hands of the casuists morality became a technique only less abstruse than theology itself. As well grapple with a case of conscience by the light of natural reason as physic oneself through a dangerous illness, or draw up deeds without a lawyer. Port Royal might declaim against the enervating self-indulgence implied on thus shuffling off the most personal of responsibilities on to the back of a system administered by another man ; but the Jesuits had their answer pat. What pleased God was obedience, and obedience meant clinging to the priest with a ' blind and unexpressed faith.'

This principle—dignified as a ' submission of the intellect '—made a strong appeal to all who found thinking for themselves both difficult and dull. As Malebranche said, it was equally consoling to the vanity of the shepherd and the brainless torpor of his flock. How completely it divorced morality from personal conviction may be seen from a curious passage in the Memoirs of Mme. de Motteville,

the very orthodox lady-in-waiting to Queen Anne of Austria. Like most Spaniards, Anne was fond of the play. But in the summer of 1646, the curé of St. Germain, a pious and austere divine, wrote to point out that she endangered her soul every time she set foot within a theatre. His letter rather troubled her conscience, and she consulted several bishops, who thought that listening to Corneille was not necessarily a sin. But the curé persisted all the more, and sent her a written opinion against the lawfulness of the play counter-signed by seven doctors of divinity. Thereupon she consulted the young King's tutor, the Abbé Beaumont de Péréfixe. Off posted Péréfixe to the Sorbonne, and soon came back with at least ten signatures on the other side. Seven from ten left a majority of three in favour of the play, and the Queen's scruples were at once appeased; though her lady-in-waiting indulges in a mild lament over the degenerate laxity of modern times. But neither Anne, nor Mme. de Motteville, nor the curé, nor the tutor saw anything odd in deciding an important case of conscience by votes casually lobbied in the Sorbonne.

What these seventeen doctors did for Anne of Austria in one particular instance, that the casuists did on system for mankind at large. Good Catholics made a point of taking their whole morality from the priest. They wanted to be told exactly how much the Church expected from her decent, unpretentious children. How near sin could they go without running any risk? Were they, for instance, always bound to tell the truth? Most lay moralists would answer that they were not; there are moments when a falsehood is an act of the highest virtue. But this crude doctrine scandalised the cautious Jesuit professor; *splendide mendax* was far too like the *pecca fortiter* of Luther. Whatever Protestants might do he meant to keep to windward of the moral law. To tell a lie was always wrong; but I might sometimes put the truth in a way certain to deceive

my neighbour. And Sanchez or Filutius were there to show me how to secure the maximum of false impression for a minimum expenditure of deceit. Witness their doctrine of equivocation. No one can object to a deception based on a mere play on words. As Filutius points out, *capo* may either mean a chicken or the fresh-water fish called chub. Hence I am perfectly within my rights, if I say that I never eat *caponem* on a Friday, although I know that my hearers are thinking of the bird, whereas I really have the fish in mind. On the same principle an unfaithful wife may tell her husband that she has not committed adultery; because in the Old Testament that word habitually means the worship of false gods. It is the husband's business to inquire whether she is using it in the literal or the figurative sense. But at a pinch I may go still farther, and put the truth in a way certain to deceive. Part of my answer I make out loud; the rest I murmur under my breath. Suppose, for instance, that I want to go from Perugia to Florence; but that at the Tuscan frontier I am stopped by officers of quarantine under the mistaken belief that Umbria is raging with some deadly epidemic. As the suspicion is unfounded, I may deny that I come from Perugia; inasmuch as I do not come from the plague-stricken city of their fancy, but from a Perugia altogether sound and well. And even if the belief is true, some casuists would still allow me to deny that I spent last night there; though in this case I must secretly add to my answer that I do not come in such a way as to bring poisonous microbes with me—'subintelligendo me non venire ex eo loco ita ut pestis me attigerit.'

Sanchez and Filutius were legislating for the average practice of the average man; to speak the language of the examination-room, they were trying to determine the 'full *satis*' standard, which passed respectability with decent credit. But the chief business of the casuists was to fix

the limits of '*satis* double *minus*,' the minimum that just got the sinner through by the skin of his teeth. This must be laid down with the most rigorous exactitude; for nervous confessors shrank from acting on their own responsibility, and liked to have their instructions set out in definite black and white. Under what circumstances, for instance, must a priest force me to 'give alms'—that is, render any kind of charitable assistance to my neighbour? Vasquez answers the question at length in his 'Tractatus de Eleesmosyna.' The obligation chiefly depends on his necessities. These may be either common, grave, or extreme. Extreme necessities are cases of life and death. These I am always bound to relieve at any cost to myself; and Vasquez rather prides himself on his severity for adding thereto certain cases of 'valde gravis et arcta necessitas,' where life and death hang indirectly in the balance. Common necessities, on the other hand, make no demand on me. They are so numerous that the fortunes of Midas would be unequal to relieving all; and logic pales before the task of diving down among the multitude, and picking out with scientific precision which particular cases have the first claim on my purse. Remains the intermediate class of grave necessities. These I ought to relieve from such portion of my income as is not employed in keeping up my position. But what exactly is a 'necessarium statui'? Circumstances will decide. But suppose that I am ambitious and wish to rise in the world: what is a luxury to-day will then become a necessity of my position. May I save up against the contingency? Certainly, says Vasquez. Can anything, then, be ear-marked as a luxury subject to charitable claims? Vasquez is very doubtful. 'Vix in saecularibus invenies superfluum statui, etiam in regibus.' As if this was not enough to save my pocket, further distinctions are introduced between cases where Lazarus is already in the grip of his grave necessities and

cases where the blow is still to fall; as again, my duty varies according to whether his misfortunes are due to accident or injustice. Nor is a layman bound to seek out the poor; even when they force themselves upon his notice, he can generally hang back on the chance of some more generous philanthropist coming forward. Altogether Vasquez can hardly complain, if Diana, a very lax casuist, tickets his decisions *divitibus multum plausibilia*, very acceptable to the rich.

Still, it is fair to add that the 'Tractatus de Eleesmosyna' did not reach the laity directly; between Vasquez and the penitent came two middlemen. The eminent professor discoursed at large on moral theology. Escobar, who spent his life compiling analogues to the modern shilling manual, boiled down his folios into a handy book. This was studied by the fashionable confessor, who gave Mme. de Montbéron the benefit of his advice. And, no doubt, this filtering process often gave common sense a chance of making its voice heard. But it was often attended also by less desirable results. What had Escobar to do when his authorities differed—when Vasquez and Sanchez took one view, and Filutius another? So far as his personal practice went, a conscientious priest would do as Anne of Austria did, and side with the majority. But must he force his penitents to do the same? No, reverence for the great Italian Jesuit forbade him to say that those who followed Filutius were altogether wrong. Whatever a grave doctor said must have solid reasons behind it—'aliqua niti probabilitate'—and humble lay-folk could act upon it without a twinge of conscience. Thus arose the great casuistical doctrine of probabilism. This forced a priest to give absolution whenever a good authority thought that the penitent ought to have it; even though still better authorities thought that he ought not. Its original object was to protect the laity from an over-zealous confessor, as also to save nervous

priests from the responsibility of deciding which of the two conflicting opinions had the greater weight. But probabilism soon became the great weapon of the lax casuist. Thanks to it, all authorities stood on the same footing—the newest and the most erratic no lower than the oldest and the most assured. Some might be more probable than others; but then, as Father Pirot will explain, all probable opinions were equally safe. For safety did not admit of degrees; it was one and indivisible. Thus the laxest utterance of the laxest casuist set the pace in every probabilist manual; and the whole business of Escobar and his like was to hunt through Vasquez and Filutius in search of 'benign' decisions.

Not but what laxity would have come of itself without any help from the casuists; the most that Escobar did was to cover its appearance with a veil of apparent respectability. The Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation was caught between two fires. At all costs it must cling to traditional beliefs and customs, since to begin reforming on a large scale would be a tacit admission that Luther had some show of reason on his side. On the other hand, it would lose all hold on the laity unless sweeping changes were made; for many of its precepts had grown obsolete, and others were far too severe to impose on an adult world. Anne of Austria's scruples about the play were a case in point. The theatre undoubtedly lay under the special ban of the Church; but no amount of ecclesiastical censures would have kept the contemporaries of Corneille from going to see the 'Cid.' And more important issues were at stake than Anne of Austria's gala-box. French intelligence was sincerely anxious not to break with the Church; but there were limits to its tolerance. Much that had been taken for granted by the subjects of St. Louis appeared by no means so self-evident to the subjects of Louis XIV. But the Church's teaching had not varied. 'Better,' it still maintained, 'for

sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for the many millions on it to die in extremest agony, than that one soul should tell a wilful untruth, or steal one poor farthing without excuse.' Such language might seem real enough to Pascal and a few recluses at Port Royal; but once let confessors dare to translate it into terms of practical everyday duty, and common sense would have everywhere risen in wild revolt. Hence the need of lax casuists to point out the darker shades in the Church's conception of sin, and thereby save it from the fearful conclusions of its own logic.

Besides, a more immediate problem was pressing for solution. The mass of Frenchmen were neither saints nor potential rebels, but amiable worldlings ready to do anything, except take religion too much in earnest. The Jesuit Rapin, although an accomplished man of the world, paints his contemporaries in the darkest colours. Priests without virtue, confessors without firmness, devotees without sincerity, were a characteristic of the age. 'Men pride themselves on being Christians without showing the least trace of Christianity. Such faith as they have is a worldly faith on excellent terms with the times they live in, the company they keep, the fleeting interests they pursue. This is true alike of open sinners and of the sensible well-conducted many who believe in virtue and self-respect. Do their souls contain a single spark of religion? One moment they are for God, against Him the next. They allow themselves half-hours of vice on the day that they approach the altar. Everywhere are confessions without amendance, repentances without amendment, conversions without a change of life, flickering, faint-hearted resolutions that vanish into smoke.' What was to be done with such people? Antoine Arnauld wrote a big book to urge that their confessor ought to refuse them absolution until he saw unmistakable signs of a change of heart. But could

real repentance be expected from beings obviously incapable of five minutes serious thought? To refuse them absolution was to deliver their souls to Satan; and many shrank from coupling the thought of these poor social butterflies with the horrors of hell-fire. If there was not stuff in them to be really good it must also be beyond their power to be altogether bad. Kindheartedness could cherish a pious hope that the Church would somehow manage to slip them into a humble place in Paradise. No doubt, in order to do so, it must abate some of its demands; but, with such an end in view, a few sacrifices were well worth the making.

Now came in Escobar and his brethren, to show confessors how to eviscerate the substance of a law, while leaving its shadow reverentially intact. A noiseless coach-and-four was driven through every inconvenient enactment; one social misdemeanour after another was weighed, measured, and found to be excusable. To the lay moralist most of these will seem harmless peccadilloes enough; no great harm was done if Escobar proved that the white lies of the lady of fashion, or the 'trade-customs' of the shop-keeper, were not grievous sins. The vice of lax casuistry lay much more in its methods than in its conclusions, in its ignoble tendency to press the quibbles of Old Bailey law into the service of morality. But in these matters Escobar's century was not sqeamish; and as to his good intentions there could be no doubt. Pascal himself bears witness to them in the ironical apology he puts into the mouth of the Jesuit in the Provincial Letters. 'Our main object should have been to establish no rules but those of the Gospel in all their severity; and our own pure morals testify that if we allow some licence in others this is more from accident than design. The truth is that we are forced to do so. Men are nowadays grown so corrupt that we must go to them since we cannot make them come to us; otherwise they would leave us altogether, and

become utter castaways. So our casuists have gone through the vices commonly met with in the different orders of society; and, without ever departing from the truth, they have laid down rules so easy that he must indeed be hard to please who does not find them to his liking. For the true interests of religion forbid our Society to refuse any man, be he who he may, so as not to drive the world to despair.'[1]

Still, even Escobar did not forget that 'the rules of the Gospel in all their severity' were God's conditions of salvation. Casuistry could only dispense men from those rules if it managed somehow to make good the balance of righteousness which their lax performances left owing to their Maker. This liquidation of their account became the duty of sacramental grace received through the confessional. Escobar conceived of it as working along thoroughly business-like lines not a little suggestive of a useful institution common in country villages. Lady Bountiful starts a clothing-club for the wives of her dependents; to every sixpence saved she adds a bonus of a penny. If Escobar may be believed, God deals in the same way with His creatures, except that His terms are still more generous; to every penny of human effort He adds a six-fold bonus of sacramental grace. In principle, for instance, He demands that a sinner should be contrite, perfectly repentent. In practice He realises that this is asking too much; and all He actually requires is that the sinner should be attrite, imperfectly repentent, and go to confession. Absolution will then make up the difference between contrition and attrition. The principle is clearly stated by Father Nouet in his reply to Pascal. 'I put the case that a man have committed sins, and that some time after he should begin to detest his sins, but with so little fervour that the detestation were not meritorious, even in the least degree; though

[1] *Sixth Provincial Letter*, Works, vi. p. 62.

he should have a regret, though but a weak one, for having so offended. I ask whether in that case his sins be forgiven him. And I answer, No, they are not; because it is not with that degree of intention which God hath ordained for that effect. After this, suppose he go to confession. Then we must not say his sins are not forgiven him, because that would be too hard in faith. And therefore, I say his sins are pardoned, because the grace of the sacrament and of the keys do supply what is wanting in that interior moving.'

Once embarked on this current, the casuists went swiftly forward. The more fervidly they trusted to 'the grace of the sacrament and of the keys,' the less they cared about morality; it was not his own righteousness, but the magical formula of absolution, that really saved a man. Soon they threw systematic cold water on the value of all human effort. How closely belief in the *opus operatum* allied itself with cynicism may be judged from the pamphlets of Father Faure, a Jesuit wit of the eighteenth century. 'Take,' he says, 'the case of two licentious young men. James has made an effort, and lived cleanly for a fortnight before coming to confession; John has continued in his evil courses up to the last moment. Many priests would give James absolution, and tell John to come back again when he was in a better frame of mind. This is altogether wrong. A fortnight's abstinence from a single vice is no proof of a radical change of heart; for anything the priest can tell, John may be the better Christian of the two. Anyhow, to refuse him absolution is not the way to cure him; it is far more likely to drive him away from the confessional altogether. Even if the refusal touches his conscience, and he tries to fight his faults, this will do him little good; since, as he is not in a state of grace, his efforts do not count as merit. The right course is to give him absolution after every fall. Then he will be strengthened

by the Sacrament ; and, being in a state of grace between his various lapses, he will have an opportunity of laying up treasure in heaven.'

Father Faure, at any rate, leaves no doubt about his sympathies. He definitely prefers a more immoral life with many absolutions to a less immoral life with fewer absolutions. No wonder that Escobar looked on the battle of repentance as won when a sinner had been got by hook or crook to the confessional; or that he and his brethren started a campaign to force priests to be lax. They must give absolution automatically—' like footmen, rather than judges,' said scornful Antoine Arnauld—to all who chose to ask for it. They must not cast about for general information about their penitent's weaknesses, as would a physician ; for that would run the risk of covering him with shame, *rubore afficiat poenitentem*. They must try each offence strictly on its merits, as would a magistrate. They must be satisfied with the merest show of repentance ; for, in his ' Methodus Expeditae confessionis,' a work altogether worthy of its title, Tamburini lays down that ' in quolibet gradu, etiam remissimo, satis est dolor.' Nor might they pause because they knew, and knew that the penitent knew himself, that his promises of amendment were so much wasted breath. There was good authority for absolving him, even if he admitted that the knowledge that he was sure of pardon had made him sin with a lighter heart, ' peccasse spe veniae obtinendae liberius quam fecisset, si ea caruisset.' No wonder that priests who put these principles into practice could boast that they were positively overwhelmed by the number of their penitents. ' Sins,' cried a Jesuit orator, ' are nowadays expiated with more zeal and alacrity than they were formerly committed ; and men are washed free of their stains almost before they have contracted them.'

Necessarily such methods led to an intolerable superficiality in days when the confessional set the pitch of

thought and practice for average mankind. No doubt, a conscientious priest would explain that he only professed to demand the minimum of a minimum, and urge on his penitents for their soul's sake to do a little more. But human nature seldom resists the charms of a fixed standard, least of all when it is administered by a live judge in a visible court. If he must be satisfied with little, why be at the expense of offering more? He could not protest, for severity might drive them away from the confessional altogether, and thus rob them of the priceless benefits of sacramental grace. Even apart from this, however, he was under small temptation to be strict. A believer in free will, he could not fairly ask them for more than he thought them capable of performing; and constant experience of their frailties inclined him to a very low estimate of their powers. Even if they did their best, it was a poor thing indeed. Why not, then, fold his hands, and trust blindly to the *opus operatum*? It was not his fault if it led to the scandal of 'sinners cleansed without repentance, souls made regenerate without charity, Christians without the grace of Jesus Christ, a God without power over the will of man, a predestination without mystery, a redemption without certitude.' [1]

[1] Pascal, *Pens.* 884.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS

I.—The Sorbonne

'Silence,' says Pascal, 'is the worst of persecutions; the saints never held their peace.' Under Antoine Arnauld's vigorous leadership Jansenism developed a school of militant pamphleteers, who flooded Paris with defences of the 'Frequent Communion,' and attacks on Jesuit laxity. In workmanship these far surpassed any production of the enemy. Literary Jesuits of the type of Fathers Bouhours, Rapin, Daniel, were only learning their trade. The older men were scholastic theologians, more at home in Latin than in French, and quite unable to put their case intelligibly before the public. Father Annat, the King's confessor, was dry and inconclusive; Father Petau, a profound patriotic scholar, was waterlogged by his erudition; Father Pinthereau's dreary catalogues of Jansenist errors roused no man to enthusiasm. Nor was the Society well served by its popular declaimers. Father Garasse was no longer alive; and Father Brisacier, though heir to all his vulgarity, had little of his wit. It was thought that he made too free a play with the stock weapon of the angry celibate, as he told how Port Royal made its doctrinal excesses the cloak for excesses of another kind: had not St. Jerome declared that heresy and sexual vice always went hand in hand?

Bawling blackguards of this class were, of course,

impossible at Port Royal. The worst that can be said of the Jansenist pamphlets is that many of them exude an air of irritating moral priggishness. 'They take us to task on every subject,' complains Father Caussin, 'and ruthlessly expose our ignorance of all. They show that we can neither speak nor write. No smattering of polite literature has ever come our way. Philosophy is far above our heads. Our theology is a mass of errors. The pulpit is no place for us; and our occupation of the confessionals is a public danger.' Later on, Father Bouhours will take up the tale, and twit the Jansenists with an inordinate tendency to mutual admiration. 'These gentlemen adore their own ideas. To be friends with them is to be the friend of truth, a good Christian and an honest man. If you will only say hard things about the Archbishop of Paris—if you will rail at his brother of Embrun, and hate Father Annat with all your heart—your predestination is beyond all doubt, and your eternal happiness secure.' Antoine Arnauld's personal failings were of another kind. The son and grandson of eminent lawyers, and himself bred to the Bar, he never threw off the influence of his early training. A great reasoner, he had unbounded faith in his own peculiar weapon; few men ever tried so hard to make argument supply the place of genius, tact, and common sense. His writings offer the uncomfortable paradox of a highly mystical, intuitive religion defended by rows of serried formulae marching past in battle array. Even on seventeenth-century appetites his syllogisms palled at last. As Racine said, the world had other things to do than to read Arnauld's eternal dissertations, disquisitions, observations, reflections, considerations on each minute sub-section of his case. Of this Arnauld himself was ruefully aware. 'Do what I may,' he said, 'my books are seldom very short.'

Ever since the publication of his 'Treatise on Frequent Communion' (1643) he had been the chief target of attack.

Only the firmness of Matthieu Molé, the very Gallican Lord Chief Justice, had stopped Anne of Austria from handing him over to the tender mercies of Rome; for more than twenty years he never dared show his face in public. But to ruin his book was a different matter. Most moderate men thought that it went too far, but they also thought that the Jesuits sinned in the opposite direction. 'The Church of our time,' said Bossuet in 1663, 'lies in the grip of two dangerous errors. Some divines have given way to a murderous and hard-hearted indulgence. Full of deadly tenderness, they push cushions under the elbows of sinners, and make coverlets for their passions. Others kill the spirit of piety by an opposite excess. They spy out new sins on every side, and break the weak back of human nature under a load God never meant it to bear. They make virtue appear too hard; they make the Gospel seem extravagant, and Christianity beyond our reach.' Hence, so far as practice was concerned, moderate men were little inclined to forsake their golden mediocrity in order to help one group of extremists to make war on another. But on the dogmatic side matters promised very differently. Jansenist irresistible grace undoubtedly ran counter to received Catholic notions of free will. Not that the Jesuits and the moderate party saw eye to eye on this question. The Sorbonne still rang with memories of the great battles fought at Rome some fifty years before, when the Jesuits pitted the authority of their great professor, Louis de Molina, against the Dominican Thomists, champions of St. Thomas Aquinas. Molinism upheld free will; Thomism emphasised the necessity of grace. The aim of the Jesuits was clear enough. Grant that a man is wholly responsible for his actions, and he can always be called to account in the confessional for everything he does; he has no excuse whatever for disobeying the Church. His mind can be treated as a *tabula rasa*, on which the casuists can print any

pattern that they please. Thomism, on the other hand, could not forego a certain sympathy for the 'irresistible' element in religion. In a general way, no doubt, men were responsible for their actions; but to certain souls at certain times God unquestionably spoke in thunderclaps and visible upsets of grace. Hence, the Thomists sometimes used language that might almost pass for Jansen's own; and Antoine Arnauld was continually haunted by the hope of patching up an agreement with them. He had much too blind a faith in logical abstractions to see that two men may honestly use exactly the same formula, although they mean by it two very different things.

Such was the case with the Jansenists and Thomists. In a certain sense both admitted a creative element in grace; no one was more willing than Bossuet to grant that men were sometimes visited by inspirations that could not be traced back to free will. And there undoubtedly was a connexion between Thomist opinions and moral austerity, whereas the lax casuists were Molinists to a man. Still, Thomism did not rest, like Jansenism, on an actual experience of conversion; if it were more than an academic theory, it was also less than a spiritual fact. Hence, the Thomists lacked Port Royal's courage in carrying out its principles to their uttermost conclusion. Jansen argued that grace and the religious instinct were one and the same thing. Experience proved that this instinct was given to different men in very varying degrees. Clearly, then, God must have predestinated some to eternal life, others to eternal death. But Thomist moderation shrank back from this remorseless logic. What was the use of the Church's sacramental system—what was the use of the Church itself, if it could do nothing to save a large proportion of its children from the flames of hell? In the interests of common humanity, Bossuet and his colleagues felt that the iron chain must somewhere be broken. To modern observers it will seem

that they broke it at the wrong point. Jansen was perfectly right in saying that the religious instinct varies much in different men, and that it was 'absurd to promise Escobarine morals an eternal reward'; [1] where he went wrong was in taking for granted that the penitents of Escobar were doomed to a lake of fire. But the Thomists preferred to swallow the absurdity of admitting them to an eternal reward. In 1649 they united with the Molinists to condemn Jansen in the Sorbonne; in the autumn of 1655 the University solemnly summoned Antoine Arnauld before its bar. There were two counts in the indictment. Was he 'temerarious' in maintaining that Jansen had not been condemned? Were his own writings tarred by Jansen's brush? The first question occupied the assembled doctors for six disputatious weeks. On January 14, 1656, Arnauld was condemned by a hundred and twenty-four votes to seventy-one. On January 16 the Sorbonne began on the second and more important charge.

Many causes combined to make this trial a turning-point in the history of Port Royal. In the seventeenth century a religious opinion was a political event. It was known that the Queen was heart and soul on the side of the Jesuits; and that Mazarin, to whose Italian mind a theological debate spelt weariness unspeakable, would leave no stone unturned to bring the nuisance to a finish. 'All the women at Court are chattering about it, although they no more understand it than I do myself,' said this unclerical Cardinal. Day after day he sent the Lord Chancellor, a strong Jesuit partisan, down in state to the Sorbonne, avowedly in order to 'help the well-disposed to defend religion freely, and to keep a check on brawlers.' It was clear to everyone that some tremendous issue was perpending, but what exactly was at stake no average man could say. Charles Perrault records that at his father's table conversation turned one day on

[1] Pascal, *Pens.* 915.

Arnauld ; whereupon his brother, the Abbé, at once launched forth into long explanations. These soon convinced the lay members of the family that the whole business began and ended in a clerical squabble ; and they began to wonder why none of Arnauld's friends made this clear to the public. Much the same advice came in from other quarters, and Arnauld resolved to try his hand at an appeal to the laity. But here he soon felt out of his depth. Argue at any length he could, but what was the use of argument to people who only yawned at syllogisms ? The new need suggested a new pen, and Arnauld's thoughts soon fell on Pascal. Ever since his conversion he had been admitted to the inner councils of his party ; and during the Sorbonne debates he had been in daily touch with his chiefs. Besides, he was young ; he knew much more about the outside world than did most of the Port Royal hermits ; as yet, he had done little for the cause. Pascal modestly promised to draft a short pamphlet, and leave his leaders to decide whether it should be printed. Within twenty-four hours they had in their hands the manuscript of the First Provincial Letter. It professes to describe the adventures of one Louis de Montalte, an amiably inquisitive layman, searching for truth among the theologians, and detailing his impressions day by day to a friend in the provinces.

' My dear ——, We have been finely taken in ; my eyes were only opened yesterday. Until then, I thought that the Sorbonne was engaged on matters of the last importance, deeply affecting the interests of religion. You will be amazed to hear the real object of all these grand proceedings, which I can tell you in a very few words. There are two points at stake. The first is called the question of fact. Is M. Arnauld guilty of presumption, because he doubts whether the condemned propositions are in Jansen, after My Lords the Bishops have decided that they are ? This point interests me little ; for whether M. Arnauld is presumptuous or

not does not affect my conscience. And, if I felt curious, Jansen's book is neither very rare nor very large; I could read it through from cover to cover, and judge for myself without consulting the Sorbonne. But I must say that, if I were not afraid of seeming presumptuous myself, I should agree with most of the people I meet. They began by taking for granted that the propositions were in Jansen. But their faith has been a good deal shaken by the quaint refusal of the authorities to point them out—indeed, I have not come across a soul who claims actually to have seen them. So I am afraid the censure may do more harm than good; for the world is growing suspicious, and only believes the evidence of its eyes. Still, the whole point is a very small one.

'The second question sounds much more important, inasmuch as it touches on doctrine: but you will be relieved to hear that it is really as trivial as the first. All turns on M. Arnauld's assertion that the Grace, without which we can do nothing, was wanting to St. Peter at his fall. People like ourselves supposed that such a discussion would involve the general principles of Grace—whether it is given to all men, whether it is efficacious—but there we made a great mistake. In next to no time I have grown into a great theologian, as you are going to see.

'To make sure of my facts, I called on my neighbour, M. N., a doctor of Navarre College. As you know, he is one of the strongest opponents of Jansenism; and, since my curiosity made me almost as ardent as himself, I burst out with the question why they did not settle the matter at one blow, by declaring that Grace was given to all. Thereupon he bridled up, and said that that was not the point. Some of his party held that Grace was not given to all; M. Arnauld's judges themselves admitted that the point was problematical, and he was quite of their opinion. To crown all, he quoted a passage of St. Augustine, which he said was well known: "We know that Grace is not given to

all." After that, I dared lay no more of my doubts before him—indeed, I felt more than ever at sea about the whole question. So I asked him to tell me exactly why M. Arnauld was heretical. "Because," said the Molinist, "he denies that the righteous can fulfil the Law in the way we think they can."

'Delighted to see daylight at last, I took my leave, and called on M. N., who gets better every day, and was well enough to take me to his brother-in-law—a Jansenist to the tips of his fingers, and yet an excellent man. To ensure myself a better reception, I pretended to be strongly on his side, and began by asking whether the Sorbonne was actually bringing in the error that the righteous can always obey the commandments, "What?" exclaimed he, "do you give the name of error to a Catholic truth, which only Protestants deny?" "Why?" replied I in amazement, "is not that what you believe." "No, indeed," he said, "we think it impious and heretical." For the second time I realised that I had gone too far, and was overdoing the Jansenist just as I had overdone the Molinist. So I asked him to tell me confidentially whether the righteous can always keep the Law. At that he fired up (but it was with a holy zeal), and answered that he would never disguise his convictions, come what might: that was his belief, and he and his friends would defend it to the death as being the true doctrine of St. Thomas and of St. Augustine, their master.

'He spoke so earnestly that I felt quite impressed, and went back to my Molinist doctor with the joyful news that peace would soon reign again in the Sorbonne, since the Jansenists quite admitted that the righteous could always fulfil the commandments. "That's all very fine," said he; "only a theologian could really see the point. The difference between us is so subtle that we can hardly grasp it ourselves; no good whatever could possibly come

of trying to explain it to you. The Jansenists will tell you fast enough that the righteous have this power, but what they will not admit is that the power is *proximate*." This word was quite new to me. Hitherto, I had managed fairly well, but now I was altogether at a loss. I asked for explanations; but my divine only wrapped himself round in mystery, and sent me back to the Jansenists to ask what they made of proximate power. I carefully stored the word up in my memory—for it conveyed nothing to my intelligence—and hurried back to my Jansenist to ask whether he accepted proximate power. At my question he burst out laughing, and asked in what sense I understood the word. This was more than I had bargained for, and I felt rather nonplussed; however, I drew a bow at a venture, and answered that I understood it in the sense of the Molinists. "Which Molinists?" queried he. I had spoken as though they were a solid phalanx animated by one spirit. "You know very little about the matter," he went on. "The only bond of union between them is enmity to M. Arnauld. But, since they must speak a common language, they have hit on this word *proximate*, which all of them can use, although they understand it in very different senses. Thereby they have made themselves into a strong party, and can count on a majority over M. Arnauld's friends."'

Published while the great issue was still pending, the First Letter had a success as overwhelming as immediate. Mazarin openly chuckled over the propositions nobody had seen, and the proximate power nobody dared define. As for the Lord Chancellor, he was only saved from an apoplectic seizure by being bled seven times. But Pascal had done much more than discount beforehand the effects of the censure; he had struck professional theology a heavier blow than ever did Jansen or Saint Cyran. And he had done so by exposing its entire incompetence to put a clear,

straightforward idea into clear, straightforward language. In themselves, his Jansenist and his Molinist divine are two honourable men with very definite opinions. But once let them begin arguing in the Sorbonne, and their clear ideas at once dissolve into self-contradictory nonsense. The Molinist gives up free will; the Jansenist, fired by 'holy zeal,' forswears the obvious meaning of irresistible Grace. But what was an incidental failing in these two became an ingrained vice in the Thomists. No doubt Pascal misconceived their real position. He thought them Necessitarians at heart, and only Libertarians in tongue; whereas really they went a very short way with Jansen, and a long mile with Molina. But their cumbrous attempts to keep their balance gave them the appearance of trimmers desperately tacking between the Scylla of Aye and the Charybdis of No through the channel of No-Meaning.

Such is the burden of Pascal's Second Letter. It begins with a further interview between Montalte and his Molinist. The divine explains that, next to proximate power, *sufficient Grace* is the chief subject in dispute. The Jesuits hold that an adequate stock of Grace is always given to everyone: whether a man makes good use of it, or not, depends entirely on his will. This the Jansenists deny; they say that Grace must be *efficacious*, and actually determine the will. Being clear on this point, Montalte asks about the Thomists. 'Their position,' answers the Molinist, 'is rather odd. They agree with the Jesuits that sufficient Grace is given to all; but they say that, in order to determine the will, a further efficacious Grace is necessary, which God does not give to all.' 'In short,' said I, 'their Grace is sufficient without sufficing?' 'Quite so,' said he. 'Well then,' I asked, 'where do they differ from the Jansenists?' 'The Thomists have this to the good,' he replied, 'that they admit that all men have sufficient Grace.' 'Yes,' I objected, 'but they say so without believing it; they agree with the

Jesuits over a meaningless technicality, and with the Jansenists in substance.' 'That is so,' said he. 'Why then,' I asked, 'do not the Jesuits turn upon them, as they do on the Jansenists?' 'That would never answer,' he replied. 'One must deal tenderly with those who have great influence in the Church. The Jesuits took a long step forward when they got the Dominicans to admit the word *sufficient* at all. If you knew anything of history you would be surprised to find the Jesuit doctrine as flourishing as it is, considering all the difficulties with which it has had to cope. If you knew how hard the Dominicans worked against it under Clement VIII and Paul V, you would not ask why the Jesuits want to keep on good terms with them. Besides, they can always turn the Dominican opinion into ridicule, when they choose. If sufficient Grace suffices, what need is there for efficacious? Common sense will decide the question, and history will show that it was not the Jesuits who got the worst of that alliance.'

'I agreed with him that they had long heads, and went straight off to the Dominicans. At the door I ran across an old Jansenist crony—for I have friends in every camp—and persuaded him to come in with me. My Thomist was delighted to see me. "Well, Father," I said, "so it is not enough to have a proximate power to do nothing: one must also have sufficient Graces, which are just about equally useful? Is not that the doctrine of your school?" "Indeed it is," he replied, "and I put it pretty strongly this morning in the Sorbonne. I used up my full half-hour; but for the sand-glass, I should have given the lie to the silly Paris proverb: 'He says ditto to the rest, like a monk in the Sorbonne.'" "What do you mean by your half-hours and your sand-glass," queried I; "is there a time-limit to your speeches?" "Yes," he said, "one has lately been brought in." "And must you speak your full half-hour?" "Oh

no, one can be as short as one likes." "But not as long as one likes?" I concluded. "What an excellent rule for the ignorant! What a splendid excuse for those who have nothing to say! But to come to business, Father—this Grace given to all men is sufficient?" "Certainly," said he. "And yet it has no effect without efficacious Grace?" "None whatever," he replied. "Then," returned I, "all have enough Grace, and all do not have enough—the Grace is sufficient in name, and insufficient in reality. On my word, Father, that is a very subtle doctrine."

'"It is easy for you to talk," he replied. "You are a layman and independent; I am a monk living in community. Don't you see where the difference comes in?" We took the hint at once. Still, I could not help asking why his community ever admitted sufficient Grace at all. "That is another story," he answered. "All I need say is, that our Order did its very best to uphold the doctrine of St. Thomas, and strangle Molinism in the cradle. But the Jesuits spread their doctrine with such amazing rapidity and success that they soon had public opinion at their feet. We should have been denounced as Calvinists, and treated as the Jansenists are treated to-day, if we had not qualified the truth of efficacious Grace by the nominal admission of sufficient. What else could we do—in the interests alike of truth and of our own reputation—but accept sufficient Grace in words, and deny it in reality?" To this my Jansenist friend (who takes these matters more to heart than I do) made reply: "Shame on you, Father. Your Order has ill borne the honour it received. It has forsaken the Grace entrusted to its hands—a Grace never forsaken since the beginning of the world. This victorious Grace was looked for by the Patriarchs, foretold by the Prophets, brought by Jesus Christ, preached by St. Paul, expounded by St. Augustine, chief of the Fathers, maintained by St. Bernard, last of the Fathers, upheld by St. Thomas, Angel

of the Schools, by him handed on to your Order, and gloriously defended by its members under Popes Clement and Paul. This efficacious Grace—given into your safe-keeping that, in a holy and undying Order it might never want for preachers to the end of time—is by you abandoned for a paltry interest. It is high time that other hands should arm in its defence—hands that will keep aloof from the world and its entanglements, and serve God for God's sake. Grace may not have the Dominicans among its champions, but champions it will never lack, for Grace itself creates them by its own almighty power. Put your house in order, Father, and take heed lest God remove the candlestick from its place, leaving you in darkness and without a crown." '

This solemn warning fell on deaf ears. On the day Pascal's First Letter appeared, the seventy Doctors favourable to Arnauld left the Sorbonne in a body, declaring that free speech was denied them; before the Second Letter could be printed, the blow had fallen. On January 29, Arnauld was convicted on the charge of heresy. Followed a moment of blank despair at Port Royal. Louis de Montalte was inclined to make light of the censure, but his Jansenist friend knew better. 'If you knew the ways of the world,' he said, 'you would not talk as you do. The censure, all censurable as it is itself, will have effect enough for the time. What the Jesuits want is to have the street-hawkers bawling: "Censure on M. Arnauld! Condemnation of the Jansenists!" How many people, do you think, will read it? How many of those that read will understand a word? The Jesuits are sure of their triumph—as usual, a vain triumph, but good for several months; and that is much for men who live from hand to mouth. Shifts alone keep them going. One day it is a catechism or an almanac; the next day it is a procession, where sufficient Grace leads efficacious in triumph. Or else it will be a comedy, where the devil appears to carry off Jansen. This time it is a censure.'

Pascal underrated his own powers. 'Although the censure on M. Arnauld was supported by the presence of the Lord Chancellor, and by the votes of the most learned Bishops and Divines in France,' says Father Rapin, 'its success by no means answered to expectations. The Jansenists had been solemnly condemned by the Pope; they were anathematised by the clergy of France, censured by the University, in evil odour with every ecclesiastical authority in the world. Yet—strangely enough—they more than weathered all these buffets, and actually gathered strength from their reverses. The reason was that they threw over their traditional policy and set to work along new lines as clever as unscrupulous.' And the new departure that so vexed the soul of Father Rapin was Pascal's attack on Escobar and the casuists.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PROVINCIAL LETTERS—*continued*

II.—The Casuists

Father Rapin would have his readers believe that Pascal only attacked the casuists in the hope of creating a diversion much as an opposition leader might turn to the misdeeds of the War Office after he had made sufficient capital out of the Government's Irish policy. Really the attack on Escobar is a natural pendant to the attack on the Sorbonne. After the Thomists came the turn of Molinism. In the Fourth Letter Louis de Montalte calls on a Jesuit in order to discuss free will. He soon finds that it destroys the Christian doctrines of Grace and sin—at least, as those doctrines were understood at Port Royal—and thereby lays the axe to the root of Christian morality. What was more natural than to follow up its effects in detail? Besides, the theme was anything but new. Ever since the days of Saint Cyran, Port Royal had been busy denouncing the 'filthiness of the casuists.' In 1644 Antoine Arnauld had brought out his 'Théologie Morale des Jésuites,' an elaborate catalogue of their enormities. The book made a certain stir in the clerical world, and led to a brisk exchange of pamphlets; but general readers found it terribly dry. Arnauld was at no pains to explain the how and why of casuistry; all he did was to arrange his extracts under their appropriate headings—errors concerning morality, the

sacraments, the Church and ministry. What did the laity care about 'errors concerning the Church and ministry?' If the Jesuits were really to stand in the pillory of public ridicule it must be vices of a more intelligible sort.

To the pillory they must go, for Port Royal was in desperate straits. The censure on Arnauld was only an earnest of what was to come. On the day Pascal's Fifth Letter appeared, the hermits were expelled by the police; a week later came the closing of the Jansenist schools. Worst of all, the Bishops were at work on a Formulary, or declaration against Jansenism, to be signed by all priests, monks, and nuns. The one hope of safety lay in rousing a burst of popular indignation against the arch-persecutors; and Pascal was clearly the man for the work. Already he had the ear of the public; as Gui Patin says, everyone was longing for more of those admirable letters, *quae jugulum petunt*. Besides, Pascal could be trusted not to be too abstruse, and not to load his pages with heavy quotations from the Fathers. As he said, if he had written in a 'dogmatic tone,' he would have had none but learned readers; and them he did not propose to address, because they already knew as much about casuistry as he did himself. Not that he wrote without due care. The first four letters he had dashed off in a month (January 23—February 25); but, when the attack on the casuists began, his pace became much slower. The Fifth Letter, which opens the campaign, appeared on March 20; it was followed at irregular intervals between April and November by eleven more letters, all dealing with the casuists. The two last of the series, which return to the question of Jansenism, came out in the spring of 1657. Part of this delay was caused by increasing preoccupation with style. Several letters cost Pascal three weeks of continuous work; all were rewritten at least half a dozen times. The Sixteenth alone was produced in a hurry, because the police were close on the tracks of

the printer; Pascal apologised in the postscript for not having had time to make it shorter.

Nor could the materials be brought together in a moment. Pascal was once asked whether he had read all the authorities he quoted. He answered that, if he had done so, he would have spent the greater part of his life in the company of very unwholesome books. Escobar's 'Compendium'—a stout, but well arranged octavo—he had read through twice; for the other quotations he depended on Pierre Nicole and other friends. But he always took care to compare their extracts with the original, 'so as not to run the risk of taking an objection for a reply.' Critics have tried hard to convict him of inaccuracy. They have shown that his letters contain a small percentage of mistakes, and that some of his deductions are unreasonable, if not occasionally unfair; as Harnack courteously observes, even Pascal was a Frenchman and a Roman Catholic. But his 'falsifications' are neither many nor important. They come to little more than occasionally confusing one casuist with another, or passing lightly over restrictions which in his eyes were meaningless. Thus, for instance, he did not trouble to make clear that Filutius set certain limits to the occasions when a mental restriction might be used. What did his limits matter to a man who held that all untruths were wrong? The crying scandal was that Filutius allowed them at all. Pascal's letters would lose in piquancy and literary grace, but his argument would not suffer if his short extracts were everywhere replaced by his victims' full original text.

However, two grave reproaches must be made him. In the interests of the general reader he was forced to be sensational, and keep the lime-light fixed on the most outrageous passages of his least reputable authors. But the most startling symptoms of a disease are seldom its worst, or its most characteristic; and the posthumous

reputation of the letters has certainly suffered from the fact that Pascal, instead of exposing the radical evils of the Jesuit system, dealt only with its wildest aberrations. And in one important respect he was glaringly unjust. Like all Port Royal, he persisted in believing that every kind of Catholic abuse had been invented by the Jesuits. Casuistry, for instance, would never have been heard of had not their malignant cunning foisted it on the Roman Church. His critics had little trouble in showing that casuistry was a natural outgrowth from medieval habits of thought. The Jesuits might have done much to develop its practice, but its principles were many centuries older than their Society.

Pascal's history might be weak, but as a tactician he had few rivals. What the world wanted was to be told exactly where Escobar went wrong; and Louis de Montalte starts by putting this question to his Jansenist friend. 'Do not run away with the impression that the Jesuits want to deprave the world,' answers the friend; 'their great fault is that they do not strain every nerve to reform it. That would be bad policy. They have so high an opinion of themselves that they think that religion could not prosper, unless their influence was felt on all sides, and everyone's conscience was in their keeping. As the severity of the Gospel suits a few, they apply it strictly to those few; as it does not suit the many, they leave it out of account in dealing with the mass of mankind. Thanks to what Father Petau calls this easy and obliging conduct, they can hold out a helping hand to all. If a man comes to them firmly determined to restore ill-gotten goods, do not think that they will dissuade him; on the contrary, they will encourage so pious a resolve. But if another man wants to be absolved without making restitution his case must be hard indeed if they cannot find some loop-hole. Thus they keep all their friends and have an answer for their enemies.

If one throws their extreme indulgence in their teeth, they at once produce their austere Directors and some books they have written on the severity of the Law of Christ; and simple souls, who only look at the outside of things, ask for no further proof.'

Montalte asks how the Jesuits manage to conciliate their laxity with observance of the precepts of the Church. The Jansenist advises him to call at one of their colleges, and see. 'Off I accordingly went to an old acquaintance, who is a good casuist of the Society. He gave me a most effusive welcome (for he has always loved me); and, as I had studied up the way to treat him, I found it easy enough to set him going. After a little casual talk, I took advantage of the fact that it was Lent to bring up the subject of fasting, so as to get imperceptibly to business. I told him that fasting disagreed with me. He urged me to make an effort. But, as I only went on grumbling, his heart soon melted, and he began to cast about for a reason for dispensing me. He had suggested several which did not meet my case, when it suddenly occurred to him to ask if I found any difficulty in sleeping, when I went supperless to bed. "Why yes, Father," I replied, "I am often obliged to take a light meal in the middle of the day, and put off my dinner till evening." "Then I am delighted to be able to relieve you without sin," he said. "Set your mind at rest: you are not bound to fast. However, I do not expect you to trust to my bare word: come into the library." When we got there, he picked up a book. "Here is your authority," he said, "and what an authority too: why, it is *Escobar*." "And who is Escobar, Father?" I asked. "What? Not know Escobar of our Society? Why, he has compiled his 'Moral Theology' from the writings of twenty-four of our Fathers, which leads him to draw a comparison in the preface between his book and the Book of the Apocalypse which was sealed with seven seals. And he goes on to say

that Jesus offers it thus sealed to the Four Beasts—Suarez, Vasquez, Valentia, Molina—in the presence of four-and-twenty Jesuits, who represent the four-and-twenty Elders." He read out the whole allegory, which he found singularly appropriate; it certainly gave me a high idea of the value of the book. In due time he hunted out the passage on fasting. "Here it is," he cried, "Part I, Section 13, Paragraph 68: *Is a man bound to fast, if he cannot sleep without supper? Certainly not.* Well, is not that enough for you?" "Not quite," I answered, "for I can get through the day if I take a light meal at midday, and a heavy one in the evening." "Yes, but read on," he said; "they have thought of everything: *What is to be said of the man who can make shift with a light refection in the day-time, if he has a full meal in the evening?*" "Exactly my case," interjected I. *He is not obliged to fast, for no man need change the order of his repasts.* "What an excellent reason!" I rejoined. "But, tell me," went on the Jesuit, "are you very fond of wine?" "Not at all, Father, I cannot abide it." "I only asked," he explained, "in order to tell you that you can take a glass in the morning, or whenever you choose, without breaking your fast: that is a great sop to nature. Here is the decision—Paragraph 75: *May a man drink wine, even in large quantities, at any hour he pleases without breaking his fast? Yes, he may, and even hippocras.* "I never thought of that hippocras," said I; "I must certainly put it down in my note-book. He is a fine man, this Escobar of yours." "Everyone loves him," answered the Jesuit; "he puts such pretty questions. One cannot tear oneself away from his book. I spend days and nights in reading it; in fact, I do nothing else."'

From fasting was a short step to gluttony. The Jesuit brings up another quotation from Escobar: *Is it sinful to eat or drink to repletion for the mere pleasure of the eating? Following Sanchez, I answer in the negative; for the natural*

appetite may lawfully enjoy the exercise of its functions. 'Well, Father,' cries Montalte, 'there is your whole moral system in a nut-shell.' Accordingly, he leads the unsuspecting Jesuit through the whole gamut of social misdemeanours, and finds that his authorities have carefully consulted the 'natural appetite' of every class—clergy, nobles, and Third Estate. Bauny allows a priest to say Mass just after breaking the Commandment most peculiarly disgraceful for a priest to break. Vasquez nullifies the precept: 'Gives alms of thine abundance,' by showing that the largest fortunes are not technically 'abundant.' Sanchez and Filutius give a wide latitude to the untruthful. Escobar explains how Leporello may carry ladders for Don Juan, and otherwise blamelessly co-operate in his nocturnal adventures. Bauny holds that a servant insufficiently paid may recoup himself by 'occult compensation' at the expense of his master. Escobar generalises this precept, and allows the victims of a 'grave necessity' to help themselves to the property of their richer neighbours. Castro Palao lays down the still more remarkable doctrine that, if I cannot get a pickpocket to renounce his evil ways, I may at least persuade him to steal from the rich rather than the poor. Indeed, some casuists would allow me to go farther, and suggest to him the names of wealthy subjects peculiarly suited to the exercise of his craft.

Montalte complains that these decisions strike him as fantastic; the Jesuit has little trouble in showing that they are strictly reasoned deductions from the purest principles of logic. So are the judgments of the casuists on the still more delicate subject of restoring ill-gotten goods. All start with a truly legal sense of the sanctity of contract: a bargain is a bargain, whether made for virtuous purposes or vicious. Of course, if a man offers me money to commit a crime in the future, the casuists teach that I ought to return it; but, if the misdeed is past and over, I have a

right to recover my fee. In that case the payment is not made because either I or my employer find iniquity delightful: all it does is to recoup me for the trouble and expense to which I have been put, for the risks that I have run. And all that, as Lessius explains, is perfectly compatible with a whole-hearted detestation of the crime and a firm resolve never to repeat it. This principle led to some strange results. Suppose that I have bribed a judge to give a decision in my favour: ought he to be made to refund? All depends on whether he has obeyed or disobeyed his conscience. If he would have pronounced against me, had it not been for my timely present, he is entitled to keep the money; I have got my *quid pro quo*. If he would naturally have given judgment in my favour, he ought to send back the bribe. The State pays him to do justice, and he cannot fairly expect a double reward for doing his duty. On the same principle Sanchez allows a repentant sorcerer to keep the profits realised by his infernal arts in every case where he has really succeeded in raising the devil; whereas he ought to be made to disgorge the fee for unsuccessful incantations. Almost as bizarre are the speculations of Lessius about the wages of sin. If a street-girl, whose usual price is one ducat, has managed to get fifty out of a callow stripling, she ought to return him forty-nine; whereas a lady of fashion, who has sold her honour for a hundred, would be justified in keeping the whole, because she commands a far higher price in the market.

Principles quite as legal determined the soul's relation to its Maker. A Catholic was bound to go to church on Sundays; he was also bound to worship God. But the two duties were quite distinct; he could satisfactorily perform the one, and leave the other undone. 'Our great theologians,' says the Jesuit to Montalte, 'have laid down that you have satisfied the Church's precept if you are present at Mass in body, although you are far away in

mind.' 'Really,' says Montalte, 'if another man had told me that, I should not have believed it.' 'Well, yes,' replies the Jesuit, 'the point does need some bolstering up by the authority of great men. So does Escobar's proposition that a man can count his attendance at church, if he goes there with the double purpose of devoutly hearing Mass and of casting lewd glances at the ladies. But you would glean some useful hints from our learned Turrianus. He lays down that you can hear half one Mass and half another; and that it does not matter which half comes first. And many of our Doctors would allow you to hear both halves at the same time if you chance to find one priest beginning when another is midway through; for it is possible to attend to both at once, and two half-Masses make a whole. Nay, Escobar—at least, in one edition of his book—allows you to hear Mass in a very short space of time, if you can so arrange matters that, when one priest is beginning, a second has reached the Gospel, a third the Consecration, and a fourth the Communion.'

From the Mass was a short step to the confessional. The Jesuit complacently laments that he and his brethren are overwhelmed by the number of their penitents. Montalte suggests that the best way of relieving themselves from this pressure would be to force their penitents to avoid temptation. 'We have no wish for such a relief,' answers the Jesuit. 'The great aim of our Society is to foster virtue, to make war on vice, and to help a great number of souls. Now, as very few are willing to quit the proximate occasions of sin we have been obliged to define what such occasions are. "That cannot be called a proximate occasion," says Escobar, "when a man sins—say, on a sudden impulse with his housekeeper—three or four times a year": Father Bauny prefers to say once or twice a month. And he allows those involved in such temptations to remain where they are, if making a change would give rise to gossip, or

cause them any inconvenience. He would even allow a landlady to keep a lodger, with whom she often sins, if she cannot decently give him notice or has some other reason for wishing him to stay.' 'I was so horrified by these passages,' relates Montalte, 'as to be on the point of breaking out. However, I thought it better to let him go on; and only asked how this doctrine tallied with the Scriptural precept about plucking out the right eye if it offends. "Do you think that a man would thus court temptation," I asked, "if he really hated sin? Is it not clear that his heart is still hardened, and that he has not learned to love God as much as once he loved the world?"'

'"What!" cried the Jesuit, "why, that would be an act of *full contrition*. Do you not know that Father Pinthereau lays down, as the unanimous doctrine of our Society, that to demand contrition is erroneous and almost heretical? *Attrition* justifies with the Sacrament, provided always that it includes a firm resolve to sin no more. And that is so, even if it is grounded only on the fear of hell." "It seems to me, Father," I replied, "that that opinion is peculiar to your Society; for the other theologians who are satisfied with attrition insist, at any rate, that it must include a rudimentary love of God. And even some of your own older writers were not so sure about the point. Suarez calls it neither very old nor very common. Sanchez lays down that, if a sick man and his confessor trust to attrition, both commit a mortal sin; because the invalid would run a great risk of damnation if the opinion that attrition suffices did not happen to be true." "Oh ho!" replied the good Father, "so you have taken to studying our authors? You do well; but you would have done still better if you had read them with one of us. You have managed to get the impression that these passages tell against our doctrine; whereas we could have easily shown you that the exact opposite is the case. Only think what

a triumph it is for our Fathers to have spread their opinion so widely in so short a time ; apart from a few theologians, there is scarcely a soul but believes that our modern theories represent the traditional teaching of the Church. But our good friend, Diana, has paid us the pretty compliment of tracing the gradual steps of our progress. He shows that the ancient schoolmen held contrition necessary after every mortal sin. Afterwards it was only thought to be binding on festivals or at times of national calamity. But our Father Hurtado refuted all this, and showed that it was only needful at the hour of death or when one cannot get a priest. And Fathers Fagundez and Escobar have decided that it can be dispensed with, even on a death-bed ; for if attrition does not then suffice it can never suffice at all." '

' " You amaze me, Father," I replied. " Please wait a moment, while I show to what lengths your doctrine leads. If attrition is enough, even when grounded only on the fear of hell, cannot a sinner repent of all his transgressions in this fashion and get to heaven without having loved God once in his life ? " " From what you say," he replied, " I see that you need to be told more exactly what our Fathers hold about the love of God. It is the last point in their moral system, and the most important. Hear how Escobar answers the question : *How often is a man obliged to make formal acts of love to God ? Suarez thinks that one ought to have made it before the hour of death, though he does not specify any time. Vasquez holds that one can wait till one's death-bed. Others put forward festivals, or the time for receiving baptism. But our Father Castro Palao disproves all that, and with good reason. Hurtado de Mendoza declares that we ought to love God once a year, and that we may think ourselves very lucky for not having to do so oftener. Conink opines that every three or four years is enough ; Henriquez says every five ; Filutius thinks that, strictly speaking, we are not bound so often as that.* Thus have our Fathers

dispensed men from the painful duty of having to make acts of love to God. And Father Pinthereau will give you some idea of the value of this dispensation when he says that the price it cost was no less than the Blood of Jesus Christ. As he shows, this is the great advantage of the Christian Dispensation over the Jewish : *It is only reasonable that God should relieve men from the troublesome duty of having to make acts of full contrition in order to be justified—as had been the case under the law of bondage—and that He should institute sacraments, in order to meet their efforts half-way. Otherwise Christians, who are the children, would find it no easier to gain the good graces of their heavenly Father than the Jews, who were the slaves.*" '

' " Oh Father ! " I burst forth, patience herself could listen no longer, " was it not enough to allow men forbidden pleasures, without number, under cover of your special pleading ? Must you go farther, and hold them out a bribe to commit crimes, which even you cannot excuse, by promising them an easy absolution, without change of life or sign of repentance beyond promises a hundred times broken ? But even here your Fathers have not stayed their hand. From tampering with the holiest rules of Christian practice they have gone on to an entire subversion of the Law of Christ. They set at nought the Great Commandment on which hang all the Law and the Prophets. They say that it is not necessary to love God—nay, that release from this irksome duty was the boon which Jesus Christ brought into the world. Before the Incarnation it was necesssry to love Him ; but since He ' so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son,' the world has been dispensed from loving Him in return. Open your eyes, my dear Father, and, if the other aberrations of your casuists have failed to move you, take warning from these last. May God, in His mercy, teach your Fathers how false were the lights that led them on to these rocks. May He fill their hearts

with that love of Himself, from which they have ventured to dispense mankind." '

Ask a contemporary of Pascal what struck him most in the Provincial Letters, and he would certainly have answered that it was their 'marvellous dissection' of the Jesuit system. 'They lay bare its bones, its muscles, and its nerves,' cries the good Jansenist, Hermant. 'They show it up for a wretched carcass, whose stench the world will no longer endure.' In one respect Hermant says too much, for the obvious moral of the letters was a moral which their author dared not draw. The real root of the evil was neither the Jesuits nor casuistry, but belief in the *opus operatum*. Once assimilate sacramental grace to a magical charm, and the Father Pinthereaus of this world are irresistibly tempted to make it 'meet our efforts half-way' by acting as a kind of unearned increment on a minimum expenditure of labour. Once make the confessional the sole channel of that grace, and Escobar will at once resolve repentance and love of God into the 'formal acts,' of which alone such a tribunal can take cognizance. But Pascal was a Jansenist; and, although Port Royal spiritualised away their grosser aspects, officially it accepted both confessional and *opus operatum*. Hence Pascal was driven to look elsewhere for the villain of his piece.

He found it in probabilism. How do the Jesuits manage to be lax? Because they put the decisions of experts in place of the individual conscience. Yes, but experts differ; indeed, Montalte's Jesuit admits that they hardly ever agree. That does not matter, however, just because they are experts their opinions are always safe to follow. May one, then, choose whichever opinion suits one best? Certainly one may. 'Ah, now I see,' exclaims Montalte, 'the use of having so many different opinions. One will always serve your turn, and the rest can do you no harm.

If you do not find what you want on this side you can fall back on that—always in full security of conscience.' 'Quite so,' says the Jesuit; 'one can say with Diana, when he found that Father Bauny was on his side, after Father Lugo had declared against him: *Saepe, premente deo, fert deus alter opem.*' But how do probabilists set to work? How does a new opinion come into being? 'First of all,' says the Jesuit, 'its grave inventor brings it before the world. For some time it is very feeble; but gradually it gathers strength. At last it is generally received—in virtue of Father Bauny's great principle that, if an opinion is not impugned by the Church, she may fairly be taken to approve it. And therefore the learned Caramuel, in dedicating his 'First Principles of Theology' to Diana, observes that that great writer has made probable many opinions which were not probable before; hence those who follow them do not sin now, although formerly they would have done so—*jam non peccant, licet antea peccaverint.*' Montalte can only reply by quoting the old Sorbonne joke about the casuists being the Fathers who take away the sins of the world. 'Ecce patres, qui tollunt peccata mundi.'

One casuistical device, however, overtopped all others in importance. This was the famous distinction between speculation and practice. Speculation considered whether an action, viewed simply in itself, was right or wrong. Practice also took into account the attendant circumstances. Due regard being paid to these, was the action wise or unwise? 'Divines,' says Father Nouet, 'do commonly ground this distinction on that of St. Paul, who grants that to eat of the flesh of victims is lawful in itself. This they call in the Schools lawful in speculation. Yet that in the circumstances of the time, when the scandal of the faithful was so dangerous, he could not have practised it. This they call forbidden in practice.' To the eminent professor this distinction was a safeguard. It left him free to decide

a point purely on its logical merits; if his conclusion seemed dangerous, he could always ticket it: *speculative probabilis, sed in praxi non sequenda.* Thus Lessius considers whether, under certain circumstances, a man may kill for a box on the ear; he decides that this is speculatively probable, but not lightly to be allowed in practice. To the lax casuists this judgment was a golden opportunity. As Montalte says, there is a bridgeless gulf between 'Thou shalt do no murder' and a speculative licence to kill; whereas from a merely speculative to a practical permission the distance is short enough. Thus Escobar asks whether, if one has received a blow—*post impactam alapam*—one may follow up the aggressor, and kill him. 'Some divines answer in the negative. Lessius says that this is speculatively probable, but not recommendable in practice—*in praxi non consulendum*—on account of the homicides, the brawls and feelings of revenge, to which such a proceeding would give rise. But others consider that, when these dangers are avoided—*seclusis his periculis*—it is both probable and safe in practice.'

This passage touched Port Royal on the raw. Like most Puritans, the Jansenists had an overpowering sense of the value of human life. 'The Church,' cries Pascal, 'views murder with altogether singular abhorrence. To her men are not simply men, but images of Him Whom she adores. She feels a holy reverence for each member of the race as having been ransomed at an infinite price in order to be made a temple of the living God. And therefore she holds that the death of a man, slain without the authority of his Maker, is not only a murder, but a sacrilege, which deprives her of one of her members. For even if he is not actually her child she regards him as always capable of becoming so.' The casuists were not so squeamish. Montalte's Jesuit cheerfully explains that I may kill the pickpocket who is making off with my purse, if I cannot get him

to throw it down and if its contents are of great value in the eyes of a prudent man. 'That tells one nothing, Father,' interposed Montalte. 'Where find a prudent man at such a juncture? He is not so easily met with, even at the best of times. Why do your casuists not fix the sum in defence of which one may kill?' 'What! do you think it so easy to set a price on the life of a Christian? Why, this is just one of the crucial cases that show how indispensable our casuists are. Would the primitive Fathers tell you for how much money you may kill a man?'

On the same principle other casuists maintain that a gentleman—though not a plebeian, who has no honour to lose—may kill for a box on the ear. It is true that honour cannot be literally stolen, like a chattel; but then, as Escobar urges, it may be recovered in the same way—namely, by giving proofs of valour and gaining the respect of men. Whereas, is not a man who has been struck deemed to have lost his honour until he runs his assailant through the body? This very Christian utterance leads up to a further point. If one may kill for a blow, why not for a verbal insult? And, if a layman may kill in defence of his honour, why should not a monk in defence of his Order? Caramuel, who always goes straight to the point, raises the very pertinent question whether a Jesuit may kill a Jansenist. 'That is a startling theological riddle, Father,' says Montalte. 'I take it that the Jansenists are already in their coffins.' 'You are quite wrong,' answers the Jesuit; 'Caramuel decides the question in the negative. And the reason he gives is that the Jansenists no more dim the glories of our Society than a blinking owl obscures the brightness of the sun.' 'All the same,' replies Montalte, 'the life of the Jansenists depends on whether they damage your reputation; let them cast the slightest shadow on your fair fame, and they become killable at once. On my word, Father, one would feel more comfortable among the unregenerate.

For my own part, I would just as soon be brutally cut down by a bravo in a passion as be conscientiously stabbed in the back by one of your devotees.'

Hitherto the casuists have supposed that the killing was done on the spur of the moment under a smarting sense of loss. What was to be said when the homicide was deliberate? This at once brought up the vexed question of the duel. Here the casuists found themselves in a quandary. During the early seventeenth century most European countries were swept by a mania for these combats; on the other hand, they undoubtedly lay under the special ban of the Church. Nor was the State more tolerant. Under Richelieu some of the noblest heads in France had fallen on the scaffold for this crime; and on the very day he came of age (September 6, 1651) Louis XIV signed a strong edict announcing that duellists need look for no mercy from him. How, then, conciliate the standpoints of fashion and the law? Sanchez suggests that, if a man's life, fortune, or honour really depend on his sending or accepting a challenge, his best course will be to remove his enemy by secret assassination. Thereby he will escape alike the bodily danger of fighting and the spiritual danger of disobeying the Church. But Montalte's Jesuit prefers a less heroic remedy. 'You know that the Gospel forbids us to return evil for evil, and that the world forbids us to endure affronts without resenting them. Could two standards be more opposed? And yet our Fathers have brought them into harmony by their marvellous device of *directing the intention*—a device which plays so large a part in our system that I might almost compare it to probabilism. Let me begin by saying that we never allow sin for sinning's sake. If a man deliberately desires an evil thing, we call his conduct diabolical, and break with him at once. This holds good without exception of age, quality, or sex. But we show penitents of better disposition how to direct their intention—that is, how to set

before their minds some allowable object. Not but what we do our best to turn them away from forbidden things altogether; but when we cannot stop the action, we make up by purifying the intention, and thus correct the vice of the means by the goodness of the end. In this way our Fathers manage to excuse the acts of violence, by which men defend their honour; for they make their penitent turn his thoughts away from the desire of vengeance, which is criminal, to the idea of self-defence, which is perfectly lawful. Thus they do their duty both to God and man; for they please the world by allowing the actions, and obey the Gospel by purifying the heart.'

To leave no doubt about his meaning, the casuist brings up a long quotation from Diana. 'The learned Hurtado de Mendoza suggests a case that might well happen in real life. Suppose a gentleman is challenged to a duel. He cannot refuse for religious reasons because he is known to be otherwise than pious; if he does not fight he will be branded as a coward. May he, then, go to the meeting-place—not for the express purpose of fighting, but with the conditional intention of defending himself if he is set upon unjustly? His direct object is to show himself a man of valour, which is a perfectly honourable wish. Indeed, a man in his position cannot but entertain it, more especially if he is a soldier; otherwise he would be known throughout the army as a chicken-livered craven—*gallina, et non vir*. But the means he takes to escape this opprobrium are morally indifferent; they come to no more than taking a walk in the fields, with a resolution of defending himself should he chance to be attacked. In all this there is not a shadow of sin. Nor does he contribute to his adversary's undoing. It is true that there could be no duel, unless he appeared on the scene. But he can always reply that he does not wish to fight; all he wants is to take a country walk and to show that he is no coward. It is the challenger's

fault if he take advantage of these harmless tastes to force a duel on him.'

Catholic apologists try to weaken the force of this remarkable passage by pointing out that Hurtado labels his conclusion 'very difficult in practice.' But he has first done his best to prove—*mordicus probare conatur*, says Diana—its practical applicability; and the fact that he did so goes far to show not only that the casuists had a tenderness for the field of honour, but that Pascal's description of their methods of directing the intention was no caricature. To the modern reader this last will seem by far the more objectionable trait; but Pascal's own mind was now engrossed by the wickedness of the duel. 'Under your new law,' he says to the Jesuits, 'there is but one judge, and he the injured party—nay, he is alike prosecutor, judge, and executioner. He demands from himself the death of his enemy; he condemns him, and immediately carries his own sentence into effect. Without a pang he kills the body, and damns the soul of a brother for whom Christ died—all for the sake of a blow, a slander, an idle word. "Is not a man dishonoured," asks Escobar, "if he lets live the foe who struck him?" Are those that speak this language priests? Are they Christians or are they Turks? Are they men or are they demons? Are these "mysteries revealed to your Society by the Lamb?" Or are they abominations whispered by the Dragon to those who hold with him? For what would you be taken, Reverend Fathers—for children of the Gospel or its foes? Here there is no middle course: you must choose between the one side and the other. "He that is not with Jesus Christ is against Him." Jesus Christ made suffering an honour; the devil makes it a dishonour. Jesus Christ told those who were smitten on the one cheek to turn the other also; the devil tells those threatened with a buffet to kill the man who would affront them. Jesus Christ says:

"Woe unto you when the world shall speak well of you"; the devil says: "Woe unto those of whom the world does not speak with esteem." Yes, Reverend Fathers, that esteem is inherited by his stiff-necked children from the Father of Pride. Honour has always been the idol of the children of this world. For its sake they sacrifice their lives to the fury of a duel—their good name to the risk of perishing on the scaffold—their souls to the peril of eternal death. But God, in His mercy, has vouchsafed to open the heart of our King to a doctrine purer than any in your theology. Fear of his justice holds in check those who do not fear the justice of God. Already your inhuman principles are everywhere discredited; and you would be well-advised to change them, were it only for motives of policy. But, I pray you, Reverend Fathers, renounce them of your own free will, and thus avert consequences that will assuredly be laid at your door. For remember that the first sin of fallen man was the murder of Abel, the first saint; that his worst sin was the murder of the King of saints; and that murder, alone among crimes, destroys at one blow Church, Commonwealth, Nature, and Religion.'

With the Tenth Letter Louis de Montalte's conversations with his casuist come to an end; thereafter Pascal addresses himself directly to the Jesuits. In the Eleventh he defends him from the Pecksniffian charge of pouring ridicule on sacred things. With the Twelfth Letter he begins his answer to his critics. Most of their attacks display the usual arts of the controversialist: either they disavow Escobar or else they elaborately prove him guiltless of crimes not laid to his charge. 'Your great aim,' says Pascal to the Jesuits, 'is to enhance the influence of your Society. So long as your accommodating theology passes for judicious indulgence you have nothing but praise for Bauny and Escobar; but once let it be cried down as pernicious laxity, and you immediately throw over what

might injure you with the public; for you do not take your stand on truth, which changes never, but on the shifting interests of the moment, agreeably to the ancient saying: "Omnia pro tempore, nihil pro veritate." . . . Did I ever say that all your Fathers were partners in the like iniquities? Have I not shown that you prefer to have men of different minds so as to be ready to cope with every emergency? Does your penitent wish to kill his man? Lessius speaks up for him. Is he inclined to be merciful? Out at once with Vasquez. Lessius speaks of homicide like a pagan and, perhaps, like a Christian of charity. Vasquez takes a heathenish view of charity, and has a Christian horror of murder. What conclusion can we draw, except that at the Last Day Vasquez will condemn Lessius on one point, and Lessius Vasquez on another, and that all your Fathers will rise up in judgment on each other for their shameful perversions of the Law of Christ?'

Father Annat, the King's confessor, was a past-master in the art of astute irrelevance. Him Pascal addresses by name in his two final letters. 'I accuse you of sapping the roots of morality by divorcing it from the love of God; your answer that a Belgian monk, on whom I never set eyes in my life, has committed suicide. I accuse your Fathers of teaching that a man may kill to save a trifle; you answer that the alms-box at St. Merry has been broken open. Every day you cast in my teeth a book on celibacy, which I never read, written by an Oratorian whom I never saw. Your Fathers have a wonderful knack of treating all who are opposed to them as though they were one person. Your hatred welds them all together into a single mass of reprobates, each one of whom must answer for the rest. But Jesuits and their opponents are not in the same position. You really form one body under the orders of a single head; with me the case is otherwise. I never gave my name to the book on celibacy. I should be none the less

a Catholic though every poor-box in Paris were burst open. Once for all let me tell you in the plainest terms that no one is responsible for my letters but myself, and that I am responsible for nothing but my letters. . . . You will not fail to say that I come from Port Royal; for that is the first charge you bring against everyone who takes the field against you: as though Port Royal alone could furnish Christian morality with champions to repel your attacks: as though God could not raise up other voices to cry out against your corruptions. With His help I hope to make you feel this; and, if He grants me the grace of employing in His service the powers I have received from Him, I may yet speak to you in such a fashion as will make you sorry that you have *not* to deal with a man from Port Royal.'

More than one biographer has been scandalised by Pascal's flat denial of any intimate connexion with Port Royal. Strictly speaking, however, he was quite within his rights. Although he was a frequent visitor on the best of terms with its hermits, he had never been officially enrolled among their number. Besides, he had a sister among the nuns; it was no time for niceties when any stinging phrase of his might be visited on Jacqueline's head by the rough hands of the police. Lastly, the letters more than once hint what their author's later history makes abundantly clear—that he thought his leaders pusillanimous: the fortunes of Jansenism might have been very different had the Church authorities not had to deal with 'men from Port Royal.' Pascal might go to Arnauld or Nicole for his facts, but in the conduct of his campaign he meant to keep his hands entirely free. He meant to say whatever he thought true without being obliged to pause and consider whether half a dozen clergymen considered this remark judicious or that quotation likely to forward the interests of their party. 'You are smitten by an unseen hand,' he says to Father Annat, 'and

you try in vain to strike back at those to whom you believe me to be closely bound. I fear you neither for myself nor others, for I am not tied to any community or any person whatsoever. I doubt if you ever had to deal with an assailant so utterly beyond your reach. I am free; I have no calling, no interests or relationships of any kind. I have a tolerable acquaintance with your errors, and am steadfastly determined to expose them, so long as God shall lay this duty on me. . . . You think that force is on your side; I think that truth and justice are on mine. Strange and tedious is the war between these two: not that victory hangs in the balance. Violence has only a certain course to run, marked out by Providential ordering. Truth will endure for ever, sure of its triumph at the last; for it is eternal and almighty, like God.'

CHAPTER XIX

CHARLOTTE DE ROANNEZ

'You think it enough reply to my fifteen letters,' says Pascal in the Sixteenth, 'to cry fifteen times that I am a heretic.' Fifteen times fifteen would, perhaps, be nearer the mark of the Jesuits. Nor did they limit their attacks to the technical issue of irresistible Grace. Debates on such a subject must needs seem dry and unintelligible to the laity; whereas accuse the Jansenists of denying Transubstantiation, and the meanest Catholic intelligence realised at once what criminals they were. Nor was the campaign conducted with any undue regard to scruples; though it is fair to add that, in an age of Popish plots and Mary of Modena's warming-pan, public opinion allowed a controversialist considerable latitude. Of this the Jesuits took full advantage. 'You flood Paris with forged documents, like that imaginary "Letter of a Minister to M. Arnauld,"' says Pascal, in the hope of making men believe that the 'Frequent Communion' was concocted with the help of Huguenots from Charenton. 'You quote from books, that never were written, passages likely to raise the hair on the head of simple souls who do not know to what brazen lengths you carry the art of disseminating falsehoods.'

But all other controversial devices pale before the legend of Bourg Fontaine. It was given to the world

in 1654 by one Filleau, Crown advocate at Poitiers and a strong supporter of the Jesuits. He professed to draw his information from a distinguished ecclesiastic, who preferred to remain anonymous. In 1621—thirty-three years before the story appeared in print—this shadowy cleric met six notorious enemies of the Jesuits at Bourg Fontaine, a Carthusian monastery near Paris. Under the thin disguise of initials the six are easily recognisable. First came the three great Jansenists—Saint Cyran, Antoine Arnauld, and Jansen himself. Of the others, one was Bishop Camus of Belley—the protector of Saint Ange against the youthful zeal of Pascal—an outspoken critic of popular abuses he was always denouncing the greed of the religious orders. Next came Simon Vigor, a distinguished lawyer of extreme Gallican opinions. Last on the list was an eminent pulpit orator, Bishop Cospeau of Lisieux, who had strongly supported the Oratorians in their quarrels with the Jesuits. Saint Cyran opened proceedings by announcing that the time had come to destroy Christianity and instal a kind of fatalistic Deism in its place. Thereupon Cospeau, whose sins against the Society were less black than those of his colleagues, left the room, saying that the project was ridiculous. The rest agreed that it was quite feasible, if the conspirators went stealthily to work and sapped doctrines one by one. Each accordingly undertook to ruin one particular belief: Saint Cyran was to destroy trust in God by preaching Predestination; Jansen supported him by garbling St. Augustine; Arnauld made access to the sacraments impossible; Camus sowed mistrust of the confessors; Vigor put the finishing touch by discrediting the authority of the Pope.

Such a story was easy enough to refute. Antoine Arnauld, the only one of the conspirators left alive, had only to point out that in 1621 he had reached the mature age of nine years. But writers of the type of Filleau—or the

anonymous ecclesiastic in the background who was practising on Filleau's credulity—care no more for slight discrepancies than did Doctor Titus Oates. What they are playing on is the inveterate tendency of the public to believe that there is no smoke without, at all events, a little fire. Hence the baser sort of Jesuits swooped down on the story like one man. 'It would have been unworthy of so notorious a falsehood,' says Pascal, 'to leave it in the hands of your friend Filleau, through whom you ushered it into the world. Your Society has openly adopted it; and your Father Meynier declares, as a matter of certain knowledge, that for the last five-and-thirty years Port Royal has been hatching a plot to make the Gospel pass for a fairy-tale, to exterminate the Christian religion, and to put Deism in its place. Whom do you expect to believe such a story? Do you believe it yourselves, curs that you are? Cruel, persecuting cowards, even a cloister is not safe from your calumnies! While the consecrated virgins at Port Royal spend night and day adoring Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament, you spend day and night assuring the world that they do not even believe Him present at the right hand of His Father. You bespatter with your libels those who have neither ears to hear nor lips to answer. But Jesus hears, and answers for them. Even now there resounds a Voice that sets at naught the laws of Nature and brings comfort to the Church. And I fear that those who harden their hearts, and refuse to hearken when He speaks as God, will one day quake with terror when He speaks to them as Judge.'

Some few months before these lines were written the Voice had spoken in no uncertain tones. On March 24, 1656—four days after Pascal began his attack on the casuists—occurred the miracle of the Holy Thorn. Pascal's niece and godchild, Margaret Périer, a little scholar at Port Royal, who had long been suffering from an ulcerated eye,

was suddenly cured by touching a relic believed to come from the crown of thorns worn by Jesus at the Crucifixion. 'Last Friday,' wrote Jacqueline on March 31 to the child's mother, 'M. de La Potherie lent us a fine reliquary, inside which was a little silver-gilt monstrance containing a fragment of a thorn from the Holy Crown. It was set on a small altar in the choir; and the Sisters kissed it on their knees after they had sung an anthem in honour of the Holy Crown. Then the children filed past one by one. When Margot came up, Sister Flavia, who was standing by, signed to her to touch the relic with her eye; then, acting on a sudden impulse, she herself picked it up, and laid it against her cheek. But she had quite forgotten what she had done when she heard the child tell her little sister in the evening that her eye was better and no longer hurt. She examined her at once, and found that the eye, which had been such a piteous sight before, now looked as healthy as the other. You may judge of her amazement. Still, she did not set her hopes too high, and decided to leave time to show whether the cure was as real as it seemed to be. All this happened a week ago, and now there is no trace of the disease. Also the attendant symptoms—the sleeplessness, tenderness of the skin of the head, and the rest—have completely vanished. But, as we do not wish to lay claim too lightly to so extraordinary a Grace, we thought it better to send for M. Dalancay. When he first saw her, about two months ago, he thought very badly of the case, and said that the cautery must be applied this spring. Indeed, he had fixed Tuesday next for the operation, although he was far from certain whether the case was not already beyond human aid.'

Later in the same day appeared the doctor, and Jacqueline again took up her pen. 'This morning M. Dalancay paid his visit. Not a word was said, either on his side or on ours, as he carefully examined the child. But at last we asked him whether he remembered how ill he had thought

her. "Yes," he said quite simply, "but I find no trace of the illness now." I asked him to look into her mouth. He did so, and began to laugh. "There is nothing whatever the matter with her," he said. Thereupon Sister Flavia told him the whole story, which he made her more than once repeat. He then asked whether the cure had come about all in a moment. The child herself replied that it had. Thereupon he said that he was willing to attest that it could not have happened without a miracle. He refused, however, to guarantee that the evil would not return—that God alone can tell—but he is sure that at the present moment the child is perfectly well. Still, he begged us to keep very quiet for a while, and not to let our gratitude overflow beyond our own walls. He did not say more than this, but we understood that he meant that our hour was not yet come.'

The secret leaked out through La Potherie, the owner of the relic. Agnes Arnauld, who was his cousin, begged him to be cautious; since, at a time when suspicion was so rife against Port Royal, the story of a miracle might do infinite harm. He answered that it was far more likely to turn public opinion in Port Royal's favour. For his own part, he should do his best to make the matter discreetly known, agreeably to the precept in *Tobit*—that it is good to keep close the secret of the king, but glorious to reveal the works of God. His industry was more than rewarded. Six weeks later, Angélique Arnauld wrote that things had changed very much for the better since news of the miracle had got abroad; there was no longer any talk of closing the convent-school or of interdicting the confessors. During the summer Port Royal became a popular place of pilgrimage, and cure after cure was reported—some worked directly by the relic itself, others by cloths that had been laid upon it. Strangely enough, however, it was only at Port Royal that the relic displayed its powers; neither in La Potherie's private chapel, nor in many other convents to which he lent it, did it work

any miracle whatever. Jansenism drew the natural conclusion. 'These nuns,' said Pascal, 'are told that their confessors are leading them to perdition. Knowing that to be false, they put themselves into the hands of God. What happens? He builds His Temple in a spot supposed to be the temple of the devil. The nuns are threatened with the loss of their children; He immediately heals one of their number. All the vengeance of offended Heaven is called down on their heads; He showers His blessings upon them.'[1]

Pascal did not exaggerate. As a Jansenist writer quaintly declares, the Thorn long kept up diplomatic relations between earth and heaven for the protection of a holy place, which the Jesuits wished to destroy. The Jesuits, on their side, tried hard to laugh the matter down. They said that Margaret had not been cured at all; the supposed *miraculée* was her elder sister, who had been adroitly foisted into her place. When Margaret's identity had been placed beyond all doubt, the Jesuits fell back on a second line of defence. They said that the cure was only apparent: the disease had retreated inwards, and the child lay at the point of death. Followed a long series of medical inspections. On April 14—exactly three weeks after the miracle—Dalancay and six other doctors certified that Margaret had been cured of an 'aegilops,' a form of lachrymal fistula. Too abundant faith, however, must not be placed in their diagnosis. Lachrymal fistulae still belong to one of the obscurest branches of pathology; for aught seventeenth-century science could tell, Margaret might well have been suffering from any one of half a dozen diseases of very different degrees of virulence. Nor is sufficient evidence forthcoming on the really decisive point. All Jacqueline's efforts went towards proving that the central abcess burst on March 24; she pays little heed to what Dalancay calls its 'inseparable accidents'—inflammation of the surrounding

[1] *Pens.* 841.

tissues and the like. Did these vanish with the abscess? If so, the cure was certainly miraculous. Or did they gradually subside between March 24 and April 14? No one troubled to ask the question, although the ecclesiastical authorities held an elaborate inquiry. It ended (October 22) in an official recognition of the miracle.

This recognition was a great triumph for Port Royal. Hitherto, as Pascal says, the whole dispute had been an affair of words. The Jansenists said one thing, the Jesuits said another; and average men had not the least notion which was right. Now, however, stepped in the Thorn to show that the Jansenists could appeal to something more than words. The Jesuits naturally retorted by denying that the cure of Margaret Périer in any way proved the soundness of Jansenist theology. Truth was not made for miracles, they said, but miracles for truth: their only office was to confirm the teaching of the Church. Pascal answered by opening his New Testament. He found that Jesus constantly appealed to the evidence of miracles. 'If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.' Nay, Jesus deliberately brought His miracles into collision with the Jewish law. When He healed the blind man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees promptly pointed out that He could not be of God because He broke the Fourth Commandment. 'We know that God spake unto Moses; but as for this Fellow, we know not from whence He is.' But if Jesus turned miracles against the old Pharisees, why might not Port Royal turn them against Pharisees of later date, who knew that God spake unto Innocent X? No doubt they represented a departure from His usual dealings with His creatures, but only an exceptional remedy could cope with an exceptional evil. 'When men set aside tradition in favour of the Pope, when they take the Pope himself unawares, truth has no opportunity of making her

voice heard. She must needs speak herself to men since they no longer speak in her name.'[1]

Nor did it seem to Pascal in any way surprising that truth should speak by healing a little girl's ulcerated eye. Jansenism was essentially a religion of conversion, dealing much in 'thunder-claps and visible upsets of Grace.' Of these miracles were the physical translation; for in Pascal's eyes the visible world was simply a sensuous reflexion of the invisible. For that reason miracles had a certain value of their own. Had men been merely spiritual beings truth alone would have been enough for them. As things were, their reason was often enslaved by their imagination and their feelings; and these could only be reached by sensational appeals. Signs and portents often succeeded in awakening enthusiasm, when all other methods failed. 'When charity grows cold, and the Church has scarcely a true worshipper left, miracles rekindle the flame. They are the final effort of Grace.'[2] Intellectualists might cry out against this contemptuous flouting of the claims of pure reason. Pascal answered that the only object of both Grace and miracles was the conversion of the sinner; and conversion implied a radical transformation of his feelings and imagination no less than of his intellect. Whether the change took place in his higher faculties and spread down to the lower—or whether it began in the lower and worked up to the higher—was a matter of small moment. The one essential was that the whole man should be renewed, heart and brain alike.

To the world at large miracles might be the final effort of Grace; to the elect they were a token of Divine approval, and an earnest of further blessings in the future. To Pascal the miracle of the Thorn was much more than a controversial asset for use against the Jesuits, more than a sign from Above to continue his campaign against Escobar. The healing of his niece and godchild was the mystical counterpart of that

[1] *Pens.* 832. [2] *Pens.* 851.

greater miracle—his own conversion. '"Where is now thy God?" they ask. Miracles show Him in a flash of lightning.' For one brief moment they lit up the path of darkness, doubt, and fear that Jansenist feet must tread. Now that this priceless favour had been twice vouchsafed him, the belief that he had been specially chosen grew continually in Pascal's mind. 'God makes Himself known to so few by these amazing strokes of His Power, that those few are indeed obliged to turn them to good use,' he wrote in the autumn of 1656. 'He has only torn aside for a moment the veil of Nature that enshrouds Him, in order to spur them on to serve Him with a zeal worthy of their more certain knowledge. Were He prodigal of revelations, faith would cease to be a virtue; did He never disclose Himself at all, faith would almost cease to be. And so, for the most part, He dwells in secret, only revealing Himself to those whom He would bind more closely to His service. Let us, then, yield Him infinite thanks that He, who remains altogether hidden from so many of our fellows, vouchsafes to show Himself so openly to us.'

These lines Pascal wrote to a young lady, whose call had come almost as suddenly as his own. This was Mlle. Charlotte de Roannez, sister of his chief patron in the world and fervid disciple in the spirit. Her story is simple enough. At the time of her conversion she was twenty-three years old, and living quietly in Paris with her brother and widowed mother. Her surroundings were far from cheerful. The Duke—a grave, methodical young man—shut himself up in his study with his mathematicians and his priests; Charlotte does not even seem to have known that, thanks to Pascal, he had been for some time in touch with Port Royal. As for the mother, she is described as a good, simple soul, with little notion how to do her duty to her children. Besides, the family estates were heavily embarrassed. The Duchess had already dispatched her two younger daughters to a

convent—the usual refuge of the portionless ; and although Charlotte, as the eldest girl, had a right to a dowry, it was not large enough to attract very eligible suitors. Nor was she much attracted by the Marquis d'Alluye, the only pretender who came forward. Naturally enough, the thought of joining her sisters in a convent often flitted through her mind, although without leaving any permanent impression. In the summer of 1656, however, she was attacked by a slight affection of the eyes ; and, the reputation of the holy Thorn being then at its height, was taken by her mother to Port Royal. Their first visit was unsuccessful ; but six weeks later (August 4) they paid a second. On the way Charlotte was seized by a sudden impulse. ' O my God,' she murmured to herself, ' how happy should I be, if Thou wouldst force me to become a nun and serve Thee all my life. But send me a Grace I cannot resist. That I must have, or else the world will never let me go.'

The Grace was not long in coming. Charlotte returned home fully determined to take the veil, and to take it at Port Royal. This resolution, however, was easier to make than to accomplish. Even the Duke was by no means sympathetic. His movements were as slow as Charlotte's were impulsive, and he foresaw some terrible scenes when the family got wind of her project. So he made her promise to do nothing for six months ; meanwhile he consulted Pascal and other Jansenist friends. Pascal already exercised a decisive influence on his patron's life. Before his conversion, the Duke had cast his eyes on Mlle. de Mesmes, the richest heiress in the kingdom. Pascal persuaded him that marriage was a snare, and that he ought to give up his property, and retire from the world. He was slowly pondering this advice when the friends of Mlle. de Mesmes suddenly made advances to his uncle, the Comte d'Harcourt. Round came the old gentleman in high feather—only to be met by the frigid reply that the Duke would think over the

proposal. ' Are you mad, my dear nephew ? ' burst out the uncle. ' You would be very lucky if you had got her after working long and hard. As it is, they throw her at your head, and all you say is that you will think about it.' Roannez persisted in asking for time, and finally announced his resolution not to marry. Thereupon the uncle exploded into a volume of curses, chiefly aimed at Pascal. The story quickly made its way into the servants' quarters, and household feeling ran high. It is said that a faithful gate-keeper made her way into Pascal's room with a dagger in her hand, ready to take vengeance on the wrecker of her master's worldly prospects. Contrary to his custom, however, Pascal had gone out early that morning, and so escaped the dagger.

When consulted about Charlotte, he took up an equally rigid line. The Duke, who knew her well, fully realised the unstable side of her character ; but Pascal only knew her as a learned man knows his host's unlearned sister. Every kind of circumstance combined to put him off his guard. He was in the thick of his Provincial Letters. She was a young lady of twenty-three, very much above him in rank, who deigned to treat him as an oracle. It is hard to be critical in such cases, more especially when the young lady appears draped in the mystic halo surrounding a *miraculée* of the Thorn. Nor was her behaviour unworthy of her dignity. In the face of much family opposition, she steadfastly maintained the divine origin of her call. ' Dearest mamma,' she wrote to the Duchess, ' no human being whatsoever suggested, or in any way forwarded, my project. Nor did a sermon or a book. I was called by the pure mercy of God—called so directly that perhaps He never before made so clear that He can, when He pleases, take possession of our hearts without the help of earthly intermediaries.' Such language made a great impression on judges more experienced than Pascal. Singlin, the great director

of Port Royal, declared that he read her letters with equal pleasure and amazement. Being a very cautious man, however, he urged her to take time; so Roannez hurried her off at once for a long stay at his country house in Poitou. Thither Pascal wrote the brother and sister a series of letters —letters necessarily full of pseudonyms and ambiguities; for the mother was violently hostile. And one, at least, of the retainers had shown herself capable of worse things than tampering with the post-bag.

Pascal's first object was to urge on Charlotte that she —a *miraculée* of the Thorn—was called to extraordinary destinies. 'Truly consoling are the words of Jesus Christ: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given." In virtue of this promise those who have received much may look for more; and those who have received above all measure should pitch their hopes above all measure.' But performance must keep pace with hopes. 'Unto whomsoever much is given, from him shall be much required.' Charlotte was in some danger of externalising her mission—of thinking that the Spirit called her simply to be a nun at Port Royal. Pascal was at great pains to explain that the real miracle was her conversion, not her mere vocation to the cloister. Fly from the world she must, a world contaminated by the 'accursed maxims' of Escobar. But taking the veil was only the first step towards becoming a child of God. In what, then, did sanctification consist? 'Before writing to you, I read through the thirteenth chapter of St. Mark, and now I will put down what I found there. Jesus Christ is speaking of His Last Coming. But whatever takes place in the Church at large takes place also in the soul of each individual Christian. This chapter therefore does more than foretell how our present universe will make way for a new heaven and a new earth; it describes the state of all who are converted, and destroy the old Adam in their souls. The prophecy of the ruin of the outcast Temple

reads to me like a prophecy of the ruin of the castaway in all of us: as of the Temple there shall not be left one stone upon another, so there shall not be left one passion of our unregenerate self. And those terrible "wars and rumours of wars" describe the sufferings of those who have given themselves to God. . . . These we must resign ourselves to endure our whole life long: on earth there is no truce for us. "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Still, just as Scripture declares that the wisdom of men is folly before God, we may say that the wars, which seem so cruel to us, are a peace before God; for they are the peace brought by Jesus Christ. That peace cannot be perfect, so long as we are in the body; and therefore we should long for death, bearing gallantly with life, meanwhile, for the sake of Him Who bore with both life and death for us.'

For a while it seemed that Charlotte was taking these tremendous lessons to heart. 'I cannot help wishing that my judgments were infallible,' presently wrote Pascal. 'You would be none the worse off if they were; for I am very pleased with you. I am accustomed to the zeal of M. N. (the Duke), but yours is altogether a novelty: it is the new tongue of a new heart. . . . All I have to say about the two persons (Charlotte and her brother) is that their ardour shows no signs of slackening, and this surprises me much: in religion it is so much easier to begin than to continue. I bear them both continually in mind, but chiefly the person of the miracle; for that case is the more extraordinary, although the other is also remarkable and almost without a parallel. It is certain that the graces God bestows in this life are an earnest of the glory He is laying up for the next. When from the first steps of the righteous I can foretell what the crowning and fulfilment of His work will be, I fall into a transport of veneration for those who bear about them the marks of His elect. It is as though I already saw them sitting on the thrones, where

those who have forsaken all will judge the world with Jesus Christ. But when I remember that they too may stumble—nay, that many of them will fall, and forfeit to another the crown God held within their reach, terror overmasters me. I put aside the horrid thought, and come back to God, beseeching Him never to abandon the weak creatures He has saved. And for the two persons I repeat the prayer of St. Paul—that He which hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.'

Icarus himself had not a harder task than Charlotte. In the attempt to follow Pascal her feeble powers soon gave way ; and on the first outburst of ecstatic fervour followed a period of depression. Yet even this Pascal managed to idealise. To her lamentations he replied by quoting the saying of St. Paul, that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the Kingdom of God. ' That should bring great comfort to a troubled mind, since it shows that our afflictions are so many marks that our feet are set on the right path. But those pains are not devoid of pleasures, and are only overcome by pleasure. Men would never return from God to the world were they not swept away by its victorious charm, till they repented of their first choice, and became, in Tertullian's phrase, penitents of the devil. Nor would they forsake the world for the Cross of Jesus Christ, did not poverty, nakedness, and abasement seem sweeter to them than the delights of sin. And therefore we should never think that the life of Christians is a life of sorrow. " Rejoice evermore," says St. Paul, " pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks." It is the joy of having found God that makes us sorry for our sins. Saints feel this joy without any sorrow. Worldlings feel sorrow without any joy. The joy of a Christian is mingled with sorrow at having followed other pleasures in the past and fear of temptation in the future. We should labour hard to keep alike this joy which moderates our fear, and the fear which moderates

our joy ; and always lean towards the one, when we feel too strongly borne towards the other. But let us never be cast down or fancy that true piety consists in an unchequered gloom. Religion is so rich in consolations that they replenish our beginnings, our progress, and our end. That glorious light streams forth over our whole horizon ; if at first there be shadows here and there the fault lies with ourselves. They are not thrown by dawning piety, but by the survivals of a past impiety. Take away the evil, and our joy will be full.'

This letter brought little comfort to Charlotte. Spiritual lassitude went hand in hand with anxieties about her future. Would she, or would she not, be allowed to become a nun at Port Royal? Pascal cut these worries very short, although a delicate humility caused him to make his lecture wear the form of apparent self-reproach. ' The past is no affair of ours after we have repented of our sins. Still less does the future concern us. Over it we have no control —indeed, we may never reach it at all. Only the present belongs to us, and for it alone must we render an account. But the world is so restless that it seldom thinks of the present ; instead of living it much prefers to settle how it will live some day. Yet Our Lord would have us take no thought for the morrow ; and that rule we ought to keep, alike in the interests of our salvation and of our peace of mind. . . . But all this I say for my own sake, not for the sake of a person, whose piety and insight is far greater than my own. Still, this account of my defects may serve as a useful warning : one often learns more from bad examples than from good.'

Pascal's last letter was written on Christmas Eve, 1656. Early in the following spring Charlotte came back to Paris. Among Jansenist friends her spirits revived ; after some months of further battling with her family, she plucked up her courage and made a highly dramatic escape to Port

Royal (July, 1657). But the Jesuits were not going to see a Duke's sister snapped up by the enemy. Under pretence that she had been kidnapped, they got the Court to order her to be restored to her mother. Charlotte was beside herself with grief and terror. The night before her unwelcome release (November, 1657), she took a frenzied vow of chastity. Back at home, she shut herself up in her rooms, and lived as much like a nun as possible. This state of things continued during the rest of Pascal's lifetime. After his death (1662), her resolution gradually weakened. A family stratagem brought her old admirer, the Marquis d'Alluye, back upon the scene; she was touched by his constancy, and began once more to go out into society. But nature was not allowed to take her course; Charlotte only escaped from the Scylla of the cloister to be wrecked on the Charybdis of family pride. On his mother's death the Duke put into execution his project of retiring from the world, and made over all his property to his sister. The old Comte d'Harcourt now interfered once more—to insist that such an heiress could only marry a duke. The only available candidate was La Feuillade, a courtier notorious for carrying adulation of Louis XIV to lengths that put Byzantium to shame. A less sympathetic husband could hardly have been chosen, but for that the family cared little: Duchess of La Feuillade Charlotte in due course became. Her married life was one continued nightmare. The higher side of Pascal's teaching had always been beyond her; to its more material aspects she clung with ever-increasing vehemence, and the memory of her broken vows haunted her day and night. She, a spouse of Jesus Christ, had deliberately descended to incestuous union with a man. Misfortune after misfortune rained upon her. Of her four children, three were cripples, and the last a scamp. Her health broke down soon after her marriage; in 1683 she died under the surgeon's knife.

Jansenist writers drew the moral that a tender piety like hers is a sickly plant, unless invigorated by continual contact with those more advanced in piety. History only adds her name to the tragic list of commonplace girls who have had the ill-fortune to arouse pressing interest in a man of genius.

CHAPTER XX

THE FORMULARY AND THE CYCLOID

While Charlotte de Roannez was going through her spiritual trials the enemies of Jansenism had by no means rested on their oars. 'I send particulars of the condemnation that so much distressed you,' wrote Pascal to her in November, 1656. 'Thank God, it comes to nothing. It is a miracle that nothing worse was done at a time when the enemies of truth lack neither will nor opportunity to persecute.' Pascal presumably refers to the Bull, 'Ad Sacram,' issued by Alexander VII in the previous month. It was meant to cut away the ground from under the feet of Port Royal. Antoine Arnauld had hitherto argued that Jansen was untouched by the censure of Innocent X; because the propositions condemned were neither textual extracts from the 'Augustinus,' nor a faithful abstract of its teaching. Alexander now replied that his predecessor had condemned them in the precise sense intended by Jansen. His Bull was welcomed with delight by the Assembly of the French clergy, a body roughly answering to the Anglican Convocation. It had already drafted a Formulary, or Declaration of Faith. This was now amended to suit the new papal Constitution; and in March, 1657, the Assembly voted that every priest, monk, and nun in France should be required to declare that he 'condemned with heart and mouth the doctrine of the five propositions of Cornelius Jansen, contained in his book entitled

'Augustinus'; the said doctrine not being that of St. Augustine, but a misinterpretation of it by Jansen, contrary to the spirit of that great Doctor.'

For the Bull Port Royal cared little, but the Formulary was a heavy blow. The Jansenists had long known that they were a small and unpopular minority, and they were willing enough to bear with the consequences of that unpopularity; but they were far too much absorbed in questions of the moment to give much thought to the future. To very few had it ever occurred that fate might have worse things in store than general disapproval—that, sooner or later, they must come to a definite parting of the ways. Were they to obey conscience or the Church? The Formulary for the first time brought them face to face with this dilemma. To use Dreydorff's graphic metaphor, they were like children wakened from a happy dream, and bidden choose between their father and their mother. 'Be of good cheer, Reverend Father,' wrote Pascal to the King's confessor, 'those you hate are sorely smitten; and if the Bishops take your advice their misery will be complete. I have seen them, and rejoiced to find them equally free from philosophic magnanimity of soul, from the sullen conscientiousness that never knew a hesitation, and from the fluttering cowardice that dares not look truth in the face. Their piety is both firm and gentle; they are full of self-distrust; they revere the authorities of the Church; they love peace; they are consumed with zeal for truth; they long to know and to defend it. Mindful of their infirmities, they grieve that these troubles should have come upon them. But they hope that God will be their Helper; and that the grace of Jesus Christ, for which they suffer, will be their light and stay.' [1]

For a while divided counsels reigned at Port Royal. Some were for immediate submission, others for open

[1] *Fragment d'une dix-neuvième Lettre Provinciale*, *Works*, i. 214.

resistance. Most were feverishly anxious to avoid the necessity of making an irrevocable choice. Very soon they spied a loop-hole. Before papal Bulls had force of law they must be registered by the *Parlement*; and the *Parlement* prided itself on opposing all that savoured of clerical domination. What if the Judges could be induced to refuse registration to the Bull? Once more Pascal set to work. On June 1, 1657, appeared his 'Letter of a Barrister to a friend, touching the recent attempt to introduce the Inquisition into France.' The barrister begins by explaining that the Pope and Bishops are trying to impose a test of orthodoxy on every cleric in the kingdom. 'The more I think about these things the less I like them. Unless I am very much mistaken, there is more policy than religion about the whole business. They pretend that they are only trying to root out Jansenism; but their real object is to bring us step by step nearer the Inquisition. France will one day wake to find herself bitted and bridled as closely as her neighbours. I daresay it is an excellent thing to make people believe that the propositions are in Jansen's book; but their way of doing it seems to me detestable. Don't think that you or I can afford to be indifferent because we happen to be laymen. You have a son studying at the Sorbonne: don't you mean him to step into his uncle's preferment? And what about my boy the Prior? You will say that all they have to do is to sign the Formulary. Quite so; but suppose that they get into their heads that the propositions are not in Jansen? I am very much afraid that my son has done so already; for he is always talking to his cousin, the D.D., who says that he has never managed to light upon them. Once that bee begins buzzing in the lad's bonnet, good-bye to all the fat livings I have had such trouble to get him. Must the theologians turn the whole kingdom topsy-turvy, in order to discover where these precious propositions are? Why cannot they settle their disputes at home, without disturbing

the peace of families which care not a fig for their disputes? They will end by thrusting the Inquisition on France; and then Heaven knows where things may end. We shall none of us be safe. Any moment an enemy may accuse us of Jansenism because we have some of their books on our shelves or because we have spoken our mind about the new Bulls with a freedom not uncommon in our profession. The less servitude the better, say I. Sensible men will never put the rope round their own necks. The theologians must find some other way of proving that the propositions are in Jansen's book. By all means let them go on writing, if they cannot hold their tongues. All I ask them to do is to leave us and our livings alone.'[1]

Pascal's letter was more than successful. The Bull was only forced down the throats of the Judges in December, 1657, after a long and bitter struggle. But the essential point was gained; for the present, the Formulary remained a dead letter. And in other ways the cloud seemed lifting. The miracles of the Thorn continued, and touched the heart of Anne of Austria. The hermits, expelled in the spring of 1656, were soon allowed to reassemble. Under stress of the Provincial Letters public opinion was turning strongly against the Jesuits. The rectors of Paris, Rouen, and other large towns even took official action. In November, 1656, they denounced the casuists to the Assembly of the clergy, which at once appointed a committee to examine into the matter. Here, however, Jansenist hopes were doomed to disappointment. The Jesuits were all-powerful at Court; the Court had great influence with the Bishops. To acquit the casuists was impossible; but nothing was easier than to avoid condemning them. In February, 1657, a non-committal report was adopted, regretting that time did not allow of probing this most important question to the bottom.

[1] *Lettre d'un Avocat au Parlement touchant l'Inquisition*, *Works*, i. pp. 222–31.

As an earnest of its zeal, however, the Assembly ordered St. Charles Borromeo's 'Instructions to Confessors' to be printed, and circulated throughout France. And it severely discouraged the idea of translating Escobar into French.

Escobar's more spirited brethren were by no means satisfied with this dubious verdict of acquittal. But they could not hope to set themselves right with the world so long as the Provincial Letters held the field. Why not, then, cut down the evil at its root by showing up Pascal for an ignorant and scurrilous impostor? And who was better fitted for this task than Father George Pirot, one of the most learned canonists in France? Towards the close of 1657 appeared his 'Apology for the Casuists.' Fathers Annat and Nouet had already answered Pascal's letters one by one; but they had spoilt their case by condescending to argue with the enemy. Pirot took a much higher line. The casuists were absolutely right: their assailant absolutely wrong. He never stooped to explain away their most amazing decisions. 'Even if Vasquez has said all you put down to him, you would have no reason to cry out; for what you object to has been maintained by other theologians, whom you would have some trouble in refuting,'[1] is a typical reply to Pascal. Sometimes, it is true, Pirot pulls his antagonist up short. 'You are quite wrong in saying that the great advantage theologians see in the New Law over the Old is that a Christian can save his soul by producing fewer acts of love than were required of the Jews. What theologians really say is that this is *one* of the advantages of the Gospel.' 'All Jesuits hold that we ought to love God, though none are quite sure how often we ought to do so. If the Jansenists have any light to throw on the matter, by all means let them do so; for the Church is gravely hampered by her uncertainty on this subject.'[2]

[1] *Apologie des Casuistes*, edition of 1659, p. 54.
[2] Ibid. pp. 164, 165.

In the same spirit of lofty contempt Pirot deals with attempts at moral reformation. He accused the strict Bishops, who were trying to raise the standard of candidates for ordination, of a conspiracy to abolish public worship by lessening the numbers of the clergy.[1] And when Pascal talked about the wickedness of leading one's neighbour into temptation Pirot fairly lost his temper. 'If the Jansenists had their way, great numbers of servants and mechanics would be thrown out of work. Ticket-porters, who so often carry letters of illicit love, would have to change their calling; fencing-masters, makers of playing cards and dice, could no longer ply their trade; innkeepers, who supply more wine than temperance allows; cooks and confectioners, who minister to tables groaning with as many sins as there are made-dishes; milliners, fiddlers, and ballet-dancers must all look out for new employment.'[2] Nor did Pirot shrink from calming any scruples the cooks and ballet-dancers might have. Undoubtedly they put temptation in their neighbour's way; but so did Jesus in allowing Judas to keep the bag.[3] Nor was this the only instance of lax casuistry in the Gospels. Being asked when the end of the world would come, Jesus answered: 'Of that day and hour knoweth no man but My Father only.' What was that but a mental restriction?[4]

Father Rapin admits that this strange Apology played straight into Pascal's hands. Bishop Godeau of Vence declared that it would scandalise an upright pagan, and call blushes to the cheek of a reputable Turk. And many who were quite prepared to tolerate Escobar in his place, shrank from seeing his methods applied thus brazenly to the New Testament. The rectors of Paris again took the field. During the first half of 1658 they kept Pascal, Nicole, and other Jansenists busy composing *factums*, short pamphlets

[1] *Apologie des Casuistes*, p. 73.
[2] Ibid. p. 51.
[3] Ibid. p. 49.
[4] Ibid. p. 137.

of denunciation. Soon a rain of condemnations began to fall on the Apology. First came the Bishops, then the Sorbonne, lastly the Court of Rome. The astuter Jesuits had foreseen some such result, and their Provincial in Paris did his best to stop the publication of the book. But Pirot was a man of standing, and the General in Rome overruled the decision of his subordinate. When the storm burst, the Society took the characteristic course of washing its hands of all responsibility whatever; it would neither defend nor attack opinions personal to Pirot. This non-committal attitude brought down a new philippic from Pascal. 'The whole Church is in an uproar. On one side is the Gospel, supported by Bishops, theologians, and the people; on the other side is the "Apology for the Casuists." Pressed to declare themselves, the Jesuits explain that they take no part in the war; they maintain a strict neutrality between truth and error. If the rest of the world had done the like the Church would have gained as little as the Jesuits would have lost; for they have never demanded the suppression of the Gospel; that would be against their interests. There are honest men among their penitents; and the Gospel sometimes serves their turn quite as much as do the casuists. But it would also be against their interests to be deprived of the Apology; for their whole object is to keep on good terms with both books. Taken separately, neither fully represents their creed. The whole point of our accusation is that they combine the two, and thus blasphemously couple Jesus Christ with Belial.'[1]

Pascal did not write altogether in vain. The censures on Pirot cleared the air, and led to a certain revulsion of feeling among the Jesuits themselves. In 1661, Marshal Fabert wrote that their Superiors at Rome had determined on a thorough expurgation of their books, and would be much more careful in the future. 'All this they owe to the

[1] *Sixième Factum pour les Curés de Paris*, *Works*, ii. p. 169.

Jansenists. I could wish that they were a little more grateful, and behave with greater moderation. And I know that some of my friends in the Society are quite of my opinion.' [1] For a while lax casuistry went quite out of fashion; during the second half of the seventeenth century probabilism disappeared from the French divinity schools. Yet the change was much more superficial than Marshal Fabert supposed; the spirit of Escobar had been rather scotched than killed. Very soon it reappeared under slightly different forms; in 1682, and again in 1700, Bossuet felt bound to take the field against it. And perhaps the most tangible result of these short-lived reforms was further to mislead the Jansenists as to the real relations between Rome and the Jesuits. Alexander VII's censure on Pirot, followed as it was by an elaborate condemnation of various casuistical errors in 1665, seemed to Port Royal proof positive that Rome had at last awakened from its slumbers, and was shaking off the influence of the Society. Alone of his party, Pascal had some insight into the truth; but Pascal's attention was now distracted from polemical theology. During the autumn of 1658 his health began rapidly to fail; and all the energy illness left him was absorbed by his project of an Apology for Christianity against Libertines and Deists.

Before he could put pen to paper, however, he was momentarily tempted off on to a very different domain. 'While M. Pascal was at work on his refutation of the atheists,' says Margaret Périer, 'he was suddenly seized with great pains in the head. In the hope of forgetting his agony, he turned his thoughts to the problem of the cycloid, which had long been the despair of geometers, and pondered over it to such good purpose that, before morning, he had hit upon the answer. Intense concentration took away his headache; and when M. de Roannez called in the forenoon

[1] Bourelly, *Le Maréchal de Fabert* (Paris, 1885), vol. ii. p. 281.

to make inquiries, he found him perfectly well. He asked what had cured him. M. Pascal answered that it was the problem of the cycloid. M. de Roannez asked what use he meant to make of his discovery. My uncle said that he had only thought of it as a remedy against the headache. M. de Roannez suggested that it might be turned to other uses. M. Pascal wished to convince the atheists; why not begin by showing that he knew more than they did about geometry and the sciences that depend on proof? Then everyone would see that he knew full well what he was about when he threw over proof in matters of religion. M. de Roannez accordingly advised him to offer a prize of sixty pistoles, and challenge the mathematicians of the world.'[1]

Margaret Périer was no scientific expert, and her story halts between history and legend. Ever since the time of Galileo the cycloid—the curve described by a point in the circumference of a rolling wheel—had come in for much attention; Torricelli and Roberval had squared and cubed it long before Pascal's sleepless night. But Pascal greatly improved on their procedure. Later inquirers had only to generalise his method—itself a development of the mystic hexagram of his youthful conic sections—and the integral calculus stood ready to their hand. But Pascal never generalised. His only interest was to throw light on the more recondite properties of the cycloid—the centres of gravity of its square and cube, the surface and volume generated by its revolution about the tangent at its vortex. These problems formed the subject of his challenge. In June, 1658, Amos Dettonville—an anagram of Louis de Montalte—threw down his glove to the geometers of the world. He also offered two prizes, 'not to remunerate their labours—far from us be the thought—but as a mark of our deference and a public homage to their talent.' The

[1] L. O. M. p. 457.

exercises were to reach Pascal's friend, Carcavi, before October 1. During the summer Huygens and other eminent mathematicians sent in dissertations, though without competing for the prize. Pascal was specially impressed by 'the fine work of M. Wren.' This was the future architect of St. Paul's, then a junior fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. From Oxford also came one of the two competitors for the prize. This was John Wallis, the famous Savilian Professor of Geometry. On this field, however, his performances were scarcely worthy of his reputation. He began by bitterly complaining about the short time allowed. Pascal answered with equal tartness that, as he gave the prize, he had a right to make any conditions he pleased. Besides, it was necessary to keep strictly to the specified date; otherwise the judges' award might be at any time disturbed by exercises arriving from 'unknown towns in Cochin China or Japan.' Wallis accordingly sent in his paper, expressing a hope that the examiners would be satisfied with approximate solutions. Pascal drily answered that in geometry approximate solutions were of small account. And when the time for judging arrived, it was found that Wallis's paper contained many bad mistakes of method as well as detail. He was accordingly refused the prize.

Wallis's only rival was a mathematician of a very different stamp. Father Lalouvère, a Jesuit of Toulouse, was a fine specimen of the unscientific savant once so common in country colleges. In matters of detail he was both ingenious and untiring, but method and coherence were unknown methods to him. Like many of his race, he lent an only too attentive ear to the call of the impossible; the squaring of the circle was his fixed idea. Not that the secret ever came actually within his grasp. It was his custom to wade through maze after maze of calculations, and end with a frank admission that the goal seemed as far off as ever; though he would assure his readers that they

had picked up much valuable treasure on the way. And sometimes a note, scrambled at the last moment on to the margin of his page, explained that the great secret had dawned upon him, though too late to allow of its incorporation in the text. Nor was he averse to mixing up geometry with his personal affairs. The scholium of one proposition is taken up with a discussion as to whether he talked boastfully—*gloriabunde*—about his discoveries. For his own part, he had always supposed that he wrote with remarkable timidity—*stilo admodum titubante*—due to a fear of trespassing beyond the lines marked out by his masters, the great geometers of antiquity.

On hearing of Pascal's challenge, he sent to Paris a pamphlet containing solutions of the two first and easiest of Pascal's five problems. With these Amos Dettonville was little impressed; nor did it please him to find a Jesuit taking part in a competition designed in the interests of Port Royal. On September 4 he wrote a contemptuous letter to Toulouse. 'In order to keep me down in the lowest class of inventors,' wrote poor Lalouvère, 'he declared that what I had done, in comparison with what still lay before me, was as Euclid's Elements to Lucas Valerius or Archimedes.' Before Pascal's letter arrived, however, he had sent off an answer to the third problem, though without entering formally for the prize. On looking through it, Pascal felt that he had misjudged the Jesuit's powers. He sent off a handsome apology, at the same time begging him to send a full account of his method. He might as well have asked the muddy-minded thinker to send him the sun and moon; Lalouvère could only reply with incoherent references to the balance of Archimedes. In the middle of September, however, he sent in an answer to the fourth problem officially to the judges. A few days later, he wrote again to withdraw from the competition, as he feared that his calculations were full of mistakes. This fear the judges more than confirmed;

they declared his answer altogether worthless. Thereupon two curious questions uprose in Pascal's mind. How had Lalouvère dealt so successfully with one problem and failed so signally with another? And why did he persistently decline to explain his method? In that suspicious age an obvious answer was forthcoming. It was because he had plagiarised in the first case from a better man, and trusted in the second to his own inadequate resources. From whom, then, had he stolen? Clearly from Professor Roberval, the great French authority on cycloids.

Once bring Roberval on to the scene, and the Jesuit's guilt was a foregone conclusion. The Professor was the most suspicious of men, suffering from a chronic tendency to spy geometrical pirates in every bush. Pascal and he spent the autumn in cross-examining Lalouvère. He bitterly resented their suspicions, and declared that he had solved all Pascal's problems, including three new questions propounded in October, avowedly as tests of his capacity. But he did not make his answers public. He was not sure enough of himself to risk laying possible mistakes before obviously hostile critics; he dared not call in a friend for fear of being plagiarised himself. At last Pascal lost patience. On January 1, 1659, he brought out his own solutions, and promptly forwarded a copy to Toulouse. One hasty glance convinced the Jesuit that Pascal's methods were the same as his own. Fully reassured, he bundled off his manuscripts to the printer. Pascal thought it enough to point out that his calculations contained two serious errors, and the whole wretched business came to an end.

Pascal's detective vehemence has sometimes been put down to the fact that his victim was a Jesuit; and certainly Lalouvère's cloth gave a certain zest to the chase. But Lalouvère was not the only sufferer. Once in the hands of Roberval all the old passions of the Paris Club awoke in Pascal's breast. He threw himself head foremost into

Roberval's great grievance against Torricelli, whom the Professor accused of stealing his method of measuring the revolutions of the cycloid. Pascal swallowed the whole story on Roberval's bare word, and publicly brought gross charges of plagiarism against a very eminent man who had been in his grave ten years. But seventeenth-century scholars were seldom squeamish when claiming for themselves or their friends the glory of a new discovery; and Roberval undoubtedly was a victim of untoward fate. He was first in the field with the cycloid; but Torricelli, hitting soon afterwards on the same method, was beforehand with him in print. Thus robbed of his laurels, Roberval naturally relieved his feelings by a charge of plagiarism. Nor is it surprising that Pascal should have made himself the mouthpiece of his accusations. The professor was a most distinguished personage, twenty years older than himself. He had been an intimate friend of Stephen Pascal; in old days the two had stood shoulder to shoulder in mathematical battles against Descartes. And he had been the zealous patron of the Great Experiment and the arithmetical machine.

Besides, Pascal himself was much less indifferent to academic successes than he would fain suppose. No doubt he no longer worshipped mathematics for their own sake, in the crude fashion of Roberval; Miton and Méré had done their work too well. 'Although I believe you to be the greatest geometer in Europe, I am much more drawn to visit you by the wit and charm of your conversation,' he wrote to Fermat in 1660. But for geometry, in so far as it ministered to the general purposes of human thought, Pascal's respect was as great as ever. At the very time of his letter to Fermat he was at work on his Apology, where the place of Archimedes in the realm of mind is compared to the place of Jesus in the realm of charity. And certainly there is no lack of intellectual pride in the account, written down from

memory by Pierre Nicole, of some talks Pascal had about this time with 'a boy of a very high rank.' The boy in question was probably the eldest son of the Duke of Luynes, a great patron of Port Royal; he grew up to be Duke of Chevreuse, and to gain a modest place in history as one of the intimate friends of Fénelon.

Pascal begins by drawing a distinction between real and conventional titles to respect. To the first class belong virtue, intelligence, bodily strength; to the second such adventitious advantages as being the son of a duke. In language quite as plain as Thurlow used to the Duke of Wharton, Pascal tells Chevreuse that he is the accident of an accident. 'Your birth depended on a marriage—or rather, on a series of marriages. But on what did those marriages depend? On a chance visit, a casual word, a hundred unforeseen contingencies.'[1] But, at least, his sixteen quarterings brought Chevreuse some kind of hereditary distinction? They brought him nothing at all. 'Your body and soul are quite as well fitted to belong to a waterman as a Duke.' But does not the world belie this by paying special honour to dukes? Not at all. Dukes are 'kings of concupiscence' on a small scale, just as are monarchs on a large. The world honours them because they have many good things to give away; but for that, it would not think them worth a stare. Are, then, conventional distinctions altogether a fraud? By no means; the world could not get on without them. Hence it is perfectly right to show them deference. 'Only a fool or a cad would refuse to kneel to the King or to stand up in presence of a Prince.'

Purely external homage, however, is all that kings and princes can claim. It is equally foolish and equally caddish to pay them inward respect: that we keep for the real distinctions of virtue or intelligence. 'I am bound to take off my hat to you, as you are a Duke; but I am not

[1] *Premier Discours sur la Condition des Grands*, *Works*, ii. p. 15.

bound to esteem you.' On the other hand, it is quite as silly to insist on paying outward deference to inward distinctions. 'M. N. is a better geometer than I am; but if he thinks that a reason for walking into dinner before me, I say that he is wrong. Geometry is a real distinction, and calls for inward respect; but it is not recognised on the table of precedence. I ought therefore to go first.'[1] Thus forcibly is Chevreuse made to see that deference is no clue whatever to the real feelings of his neighbours, nor does his rank in any way dispense him from the duty of trying to win their good opinion. 'Your power over them is based on their concupiscence, not on your own strength. Do not, therefore, use them harshly. Grant them whatever they can fairly ask; help them in time of need; take a pleasure in doing good, and you will be a true king of concupiscence.' And Pascal ends by telling the young duke that all this does not go for much. 'If you do no more, you will certainly lose your soul. But, at least, you will lose it like a gentleman.'[2]

These last words may seem surprising in the mouth of a Jansenist ascetic; but Pascal's conversion did not mean an absolute breach with the friends of former days. In March, 1657—just as the Provincial Letters were coming to an end—the mathematician Mylon reported to Huygens that M. Pascal was very hard to see now that he had given himself up entirely to devotional practices. But his interest in mathematics was by no means dead; and he would still find the answer to a problem if M. Carcavi laid it before him. After the affair of the cycloid, however, he became a little more ready to leave his retirement. He was sometimes to be seen in Mme. de Sablé's drawing-room; and one of the very few samples of his general correspondence that fate has respected is a letter thanking her for having introduced him to the learned Protestant physician—Menjot.

[1] *Second Discours*, p. 18. [2] *Troisième Discours*, p. 19.

Pascal was especially struck with his book on malignant fevers ; ' in a very few words he makes clear why the power of matter to impair our bodily functions and bring on delirium is no argument against the immateriality of the soul.' Such subjects had for Pascal more than a purely theological interest. His labours over the cycloid had dealt a shattering blow at his health. In the summer of 1659 Carcavi told Huygens that, ever since his book came out, he had been in a state of complete lassitude and exhaustion. In the following spring he decided to try the effects of his native air. But his nerves were still in such a state that it was thought better to send him from Paris to Clermont by canal, a journey that took three weeks. Under their charge, supplemented by a liberal diet of asses' milk, he recovered, and returned home in the autumn.

Here a new responsibility awaited him. His eldest nephew, Stephen Périer, had reached the age of eighteen, and was anxious to matriculate at the University of Paris. So it was settled that he should live with his uncle, and go to lectures at the Collège d'Harcourt, whose head, M. Fortin, was a devoted Jansenist ; indeed, report said that more than one of the Provincial Letters had issued from the college press. But Stephen's two younger brothers, Louis and Blaise—aged respectively nine and seven—were also in Paris, having been left there by their parents to wait for a vacancy in the ' little schools ' of Port Royal. The schools, however, had been closed by the Government in the spring of 1660 ; and the boys had been leading an unsettled existence under charge of a Jansenist ecclesiastic, M. Rebergues. Now their aunt Jacqueline intervened, and dispatched them to join Stephen at their uncle's house. To excuse herself for this liberty, she wrote him a characteristic letter, dated November 10, 1660. ' Good day, and a happy new year, my dear brother. You will not doubt that these good wishes were in my heart at the beginning of

the year, although I am only able to give them utterance at its end. But it is only fair to tell you that this year, which I have offered up to God with all my heart, has made no difference in the feelings that I ought to have for you in Him. When I think how quickly the year has gone by, and how little pain came of a separation from which it would seem that nature must have shrunk, I cannot help yearning for eternity; for certainly time is of small account. But I must not stray longer down a path that would lead us far. I entered on it unawares; for my only object in writing was to congratulate you on having become the father of a family, in the sense that God is our Father. And I must beg pardon for the trouble I have caused you. It is all my doing; though I only acted under the belief that you would enjoy it, and that the inconvenience would not last long. M. Rebergues will soon be able to take the children back; indeed, I think he could take them off your hands at any time, if you would only send him word.' [1]

In more than one sense the boys proved a serious drain on their uncle's resources. Stephen was a studious youth, with a turn for mathematics; but Louis is described by his sister as an irresponsible madcap, more fond of jokes than lessons. Besides, Pascal had undertaken to be financially responsible for his education; and most of Pascal's small income now went on medicines and doctors' bills. Then, too, an endless list of charities still further lightened his purse; no one ever took more to heart Saint Cyran's maxim that fasting and almsgiving were the two wings of prayer. Not that he felt tempted to launch out into ostentatious munificence; for he held that the cheerful giver, whom God loved, was he who 'served the poor poorly' by daily, unpretentious efforts. Still, even these cost money, and money was scarce to find. So Pascal decided to embark on a commercial enterprise. The idea

[1] L. O. M. p. 396.

was not absolutely new; ten years before he had certainly tried to put his arithmetical machine on the market. Now, however, he came forward with a much more popular scheme. Of late years great efforts had been made to improve the streets of Paris, and an enormous increase of wheeled traffic was the result. In 1652, Pierre Petit—Pascal's old friend of the Paris Club—noticed that most rich people kept two or three coaches, while even lawyers and professional men were setting up their carriage; it was becoming quite undignified to go about on foot, or even to ride. But what was to happen to the many who could not afford to keep a carriage? Pascal came forward with a scheme that was nothing less than the invention of the omnibus. Public conveyances were to perambulate Paris, and convey passengers at the fixed price of five sous—twopence half-penny a head. Through the kind offices of Roannez and others, the necessary capital was raised. The Lord Steward, the Marquis de Sourches, was interested in the matter, and a gracious permission was obtained from the King. On March 21, 1662, Gilberte Périer was able to write to her cousin, Arnauld de Pomponne, nephew of Antoine and Angélique, and a future Foreign Secretary to Louis XIV:

'As everyone else has had a share in this business of the coaches, I have schemed hard for the duty of writing to tell you of its success. We opened in tremendous state last Saturday morning at seven o'clock. Of the seven coaches put on the road three were sent to the Porte St. Antoine, and four stationed in front of the Luxembourg. Here they were met by two commissaries of the Provost-Court in full dress, four sergeants of the Marshalsea, about a dozen City-Archers, and as many men on horse-back. When all was ready, the commissaries made a speech, setting forth the usefulness of the enterprise, and warning the people in the King's name that any disorderliness would be followed by exemplary punishment. Then they handed the drivers

their livery-coats; these were blue, with the Royal and the City Arms worked on the breast. Then the order was given to start. Off went the first coach with a sergeant of the Marshalsea inside, who remained in it the whole of the day. The other coaches, each with its sergeant, were dispatched at intervals of half an hour; while the Archers and the mounted men kept order along the route. Not that there was the least disturbance, although the New Bridge and the adjoining streets were crowded with spectators. It was amusing to see the workmen leave their benches to stare; all along the line of way little more work was done on Saturday than if it had been a festival. On the first morning several of the coaches were full, and there were even women passengers; but in the afternoon the crowd was so great that it was impossible to get up to them. Indeed, the only drawback to the scheme is exactly the one you foretold. People wait a long time in the street for a coach; and when it comes, they find it full. They comfort themselves with the thought that there will be another in ten minutes; but that also proves to be full, and they end by having to go on foot. I speak the more feelingly, since that has happened to myself. I was anxious to come back by coach from St. Merry's, Glass-House Street, because it is rather a long way from my brother's; but I had the annoyance of having to see no less than five coaches go by because they were all full. As I waited, I listened to the blessings the passers-by called down upon the promoters of so excellent an enterprise, though some of them went on to say that there ought to have been at least twenty coaches on the road instead of only seven. Indeed, so useful have the coaches proved, that everyone wants a line of them in his own quarter of the city. The shop-keepers of St. Denis Street have even been talking of a formal petition, and it was almost decided to let them have a line next week. But yesterday morning, when M. de

Roannez, M. de Crenan, and the Lord Steward were all at the Louvre, the King began to talk most graciously about their undertaking, ending up by asking them when they proposed to establish *our* line. These words of the King set them thinking of a line in St. Honoré Street; the shop-keepers must wait for a while. Such, then, is the position of affairs. You will be as much surprised as we are at our success; it has surpassed our fondest expectations. And I will not fail to act as my brother's deputy, and send you any further good news there may be. He would have been delighted to do so himself, were he in a fit state to write.' [1]

[1] L. O. M. p. 80.

CHAPTER XXI

THE APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY

'God has never made a family more happy,' wrote the uncle of Margaret Périer soon after the miracle of the holy Thorn; 'may He send that none will be more grateful.'[1] As a thank-offering he proposed to devote the rest of his life to an Apology for Christianity against Libertines and Deists. The outcome of his labours is the book of Pensées —'Thoughts on Religion and Certain Other Subjects'— published by a Jansenist committee some eight years after his death. Much ingenuity has been spent in determining the form the book would have taken had Pascal lived to finish it. In the spring of 1659 he certainly had a definite scheme in his mind, and expounded it in a long lecture to some friends at Port Royal. And the more finished fragments read as though he would have cast his Apology in the same mould as the Provincial Letters, with the free-thinkers in place of Escobar. But he had reckoned without the progress of his illness. Very soon after the Port Royal lecture his nephew noticed the first signs of the final breakdown. Not that any great change was apparent on the surface. It was only during the last few months of his life that Pascal was kept a prisoner to his room. But month by month he came more completely into the doctors' hands. His books were cut off; his family had strict orders to keep his mind off serious subjects. His memory began

[1] *Pens.* 856.

to go. He, who once had boasted that he did not know what it was to forget, now found great difficulty in remembering an idea long enough to commit it to paper. Hence it is idle to look for absolute coherence in his book. 'I shall put down my ideas without order,' writes Pascal himself, 'though perhaps their confusion is not altogether unintentional. To treat my subject systematically would be doing it too much honour; I mean to show that it is incapable of such handling.' [1]

In other words, an adequate defence of Christianity could not be written. 'Faith is a gift of God; do not think we say it is a gift of reasoning.' [2] Men might conceivably be argued into accepting the geometrical God of Descartes; but no one could argue them into having a new heart. Only the miracle of conversion could make clear to them what religion really meant. 'Let us talk by the light of nature,' says Pascal to his free-thinkers. 'If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible. We cannot tell what He is, or even *that* He is. Why, then, blame Christians for not being ready with the evidences of their religion? They themselves tell you that it is *stultitiam*, a folly. If they began to prove it, they would be eating their own words. Their lack of proofs betokens anything but a lack of sense.' [3] The most an Apology could hope to do was to clear away the stumbling-blocks from the doubter's path, and thereby lead him to the threshold of religion. There he must wait till Grace unbarred the door. But what were the usual stumbling-blocks? 'Men hate and despise religion,' answers Pascal; 'but they are afraid it may be true. The remedy is to begin by showing them that it is not irrational. Then make them see that it is worthy of respect, because it understands our nature; and that it is desirable, because it does us good. Lastly, when

[1] *Pens.* 373. [2] *Pens.* 279. [3] *Pens.* 233.

they have begun to wish it to be true, we can prove that it really is so.' [1]

Accordingly Pascal at once attacks the first part of his thesis. Religion is not irrational, because it rests on just as sure foundations as any other branch of knowledge. Which of the sciences passes for the most exact? Clearly geometry. But geometry is not made up simply of demonstrations; it starts from certain elementary assumptions of space, motion, and the like. In his youth Pascal had doubted whether it was right to take even these ideas for granted; but, as he grew older, he changed his mind, and decided that their very simplicity dispensed them from the need of proof. Common sense instinctively saw what they meant; so Pascal transferred them out of the domain of reason, and classed them as 'sentiments of the heart.' But, if geometers did not scruple to base all their reasoning on a sentiment, why should Christians fear to do the like? 'Truth does not reach us only through the reason; it comes to us also from the heart. It is in this way that we grasp first principles: time, motion, number, space. Reason has no say in the matter, and its objections go wide of the mark. Our inability to prove these things only shows the limits of our reasoning powers; the sceptics are quite wrong in pretending that it throws discredit on our knowledge. We feel a sentiment, we draw a conclusion—both with equal certitude, although in different ways. This should serve as a lesson to reason, which would like to lay down the law about everything, and thinks that we need no other teacher. Far from it. Would to God that we had no need of reason at all, and that all our knowledge came through instinct and feeling. But Nature has not vouchsafed us this boon. Only a small part of our knowledge comes through this channel; for all else we must depend on reasoning. Very happy and very lawfully

[1] *Pens.* 187.

persuaded are those into whose hearts God has been pleased to put an intuitive religion. With the rest we can only argue, waiting till God awakens in their heart the instinct without which all faith is but human and insufficient for salvation.'[1]

Now, however, arose a fresh difficulty. The geometers pointed out that their axioms were universally accepted; whereas, on Pascal's own showing, an intuitive religion was only given to few. Was not that enough to throw grave doubts on its credibility? Pascal answered that all axioms stood or fell together. At that very moment a hot debate over their validity was raging between the sceptics and the dogmatists—a polite periphrasis for the followers of Descartes. Cartesianism maintained the entire trustworthiness of its 'clear ideas': had not the Master directly connected them with his geometrical God? Scepticism answered that the clearness of an idea was no guarantee of its truth. For aught Cartesianism could tell, it might have sprung up by chance. 'Our mind is flung into a body, and there finds number, space, dimension. It reasons about them; it calls them Nature or Necessity, and cannot do otherwise.' Besides, what assurance was there that everyone's intuitions were alike? No doubt, when two men talk of motion, both appear to mean the same thing; and Pascal allows that we should run small risk in betting that they really do so. Still, the point is not 'certain with the last degree of certitude. That is enough to cast a shade over the whole question. Our natural clearness is darkened without being altogether extinguished; and the dogmatists are hard pressed by the sceptical crew, which lives in a realm of ambiguous ambiguities, whence doubt cannot banish all the certitude, nor Nature put all the doubts to flight.'[2] Are, then, the sceptics in the right? The dogmatists cannot answer them, although they have been trying to do so ever since the world began. But neither can the school of

[1] *Pens.* 282. [2] *Pens.* 392.

Pyrrho rout the dogmatists. These are impregnable when they declare that secretly the sceptic himself believes in his intuitions. What else can he do? 'Is he to question everything? Can he doubt if he is awake—if he is pinched or burnt—if he is doubting—if he is? He cannot go so far as that; I wager that a perfect sceptic never yet existed. Nature comes to the aid of tottering reason, and checks its ravings in mid course.'[1] Thus metaphysics teach the geometer a salutary lesson in humility. He emerges full of self-distrust, still clinging to his intuitions, although he knows he cannot defend them 'with the sword of certitude in his hand.' No longer, therefore, will he mock at the 'trembling faith' of Port Royal.

But why should our most certain knowledge be so tentative and inexact, so full of 'ambiguous ambiguities?' Pascal bids the inquirer consider his position in the universe. He is reminded that the earth is no more than a point in the vast course described by the sun; while that course itself is but a speck on the broad bosom of Nature. 'She is a sphere, whose centre is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere to be seen. Let man, then, consider what he is in comparison with the whole expanse of being. Let him picture himself as lost in a blind alley of Nature; and from what he knows of his little dungeon let him learn to put its proper price on the earth, on kingdoms, cities, and himself.' Before the inquirer has time to draw breath, Pascal whirls him off to the opposite extreme. 'A mite shall show him the infinite smallness of its limbs. Yet in those limbs are joints and veins, blood in the veins, humours in the blood, drops in the humours, vapours in the drops. Who will not be amazed to find that he, whose body was just now seen to be an imperceptible atom in an insignificant planet, should loom like a colossus, a world, a universe, beside such impenetrable smallness? What, then, is man's real place in

[1] *Pens.* 434.

Nature? To infinity we are naught; to zero we are everything. We are a mean between two extremes, infinitely far removed from both—alike from the nothingness whence we were taken and from the whole that swallows us up. We are something, we are not everything; and the limitations of our middle state run through all our faculties alike. Our intelligence holds in the world of mind the same rank as our body in the world of matter. Our senses cannot perceive extremes. Too much noise deafens us, too much light dazzles; too great nearness and too great distance hinder our sight. Our utterances are unintelligible if they are too long-winded or too concise. Too much truth bewilders us. First principles are too clear for us; too much pleasure is a weariness, too much musical harmony an annoyance. Too many kindnesses exasperate us; we like to be able to keep a balance of gratitude in hand. To extremes of heat and cold we are insensible. Excess of anything is our enemy; we do not feel, we suffer it. Youth and old age hamper the mind; so does too much or too little knowledge. In short, all extremes escape us; they were not made for us, nor we for them. That is our real state; that is why we are equally incapable of absolute ignorance and full understanding. Afloat in mid-ocean, we wash to and fro between two opposite infinities. We snatch at an object; it slips through our fingers, and glides away into an endless distance. Nothing stays for us. We burn with desire to reach the solid rock, and build thereon a tower reaching to the heavens. But our little building cracks and falls; the earth opens her mouth, disclosing a fathomless abyss. Let us, then, give over the search for certitude and assurance, and stay quietly in the place that Nature has appointed for us.' [1]

Perhaps in this passage Pascal's rhetoric runs somewhat ahead of his meaning. He has no quarrel with the rough-

[1] *Pens.* 72.

and-ready approximations that satisfy an average man; what he denies is that we can reach the quintessential reality beloved by philosophers, more especially philosophers in the service of a geometrical God. 'Here below things are partly true and partly false. Such is not the case with pure truth; it would be tarnished and destroyed by an alloy of falsehood. Hence, if by truth be meant pure truth, we do not possess it at all.'[1] Why do we not possess it? Because all our knowledge is 'afloat in mid-ocean'; it is for ever oscillating between two opposite errors. Things are neither black nor white; they are a mixture of the two. But this inconclusiveness revolts us; we insist on seeing them only in one light. Either we overlook the brighter shades and pronounce the universe black, or else we pass over its darker qualities and boldly call it white. Philosophers are the worst offenders, because they are in the grip of their logic, and logic forces them to be absolutely self-consistent. Each of them holds, as an article of faith, that his characteristic method is the one and only key to all the riddles of the Sphinx. Is he a sceptic? He must do his best to doubt his own existence. Is he a dogmatist? He must believe that argument alone can bring him to a haven of universal certitude. But experience knows nothing of these royal roads to truth; to pin one's faith to a single principle means flying straight in the face of reality. 'Nature confounds the sceptic, and reason the dogmatist. . . . Pyrrhonists, Stoics, Atheists—all their premises are true. But all their conclusions are false, because the opposite premises are also true.'[2] The wise man is he who dares to be resolutely inconsistent—to be sometimes one thing, sometimes another. Now he will boldly demonstrate, now temper certitude with doubt, doubt with blind faith. Thus he will be at once 'a Pyrrhonist, a geometer, and a Christian.'

[1] *Pens.* 385. [2] *Pens.* 394.

Nor is this rule confined to the realm of abstract speculation. One of the aims of Descartes was to bring metaphysics out of the class-rooms into the world at large. Every drawing-room had its priggish *demi-savant* burning to reorganise the manners and customs of his neighbours on a basis of pure reason. He was for ever pointing out the logical absurdity of all their arrangements. Nothing, for instance, vexed him more than to see an otherwise rational being spend a whole day pursuing a hare, for which he would not give sixpence at the poulterer's. But the *demi-savant* had small knowledge of human nature. 'Do you see that man?' asks Pascal. 'A few months ago he lost his only son, and this morning he seemed quite broken down by his quarrels and his law-suits. How has he managed to forget them? Don't be surprised. He is watching to see on which side that wild boar will break out, which the hounds have been after for the last six hours. That is enough for him. If he can only force himself to enter thoroughly into the sport, he will be happy for a while.' [1] But the *demi-savant* only sighed, and went on to lament the still more irrational habit of ranking people by their birth and fortune, instead of by their brains. 'Splendid,' cries Pascal. 'He doesn't want me to show respect to a man dressed in brocade, and followed by seven or eight footmen. Why, he would tell them to give me a thrashing, if I did not take off my hat. What an excellent plan it is to distinguish people by their outsides. Which of us is to give way to the other? The stupider? I am quite as clever as he; we should come to blows on the point. He has four footmen, and I have only one. That is obvious; one has only to count them. That being so, I should be a fool, if I did not let him pass. There we are at peace, which is the greatest of blessings.' [2]

Disgust at the follies of the *demi-savant* induced Montaigne and the Libertines to broach a doctrine which Jean

[1] *Pens.* 139. [2] *Pens.* 315.

Jacques Rousseau will one day preach from the house-tops. They said that pure reason was the plaything of ingenious asses; men were happy and prosperous in proportion as they left it in the lurch, and let themselves be guided by the natural instincts of the unsophisticated human heart. Hence their idolatry of custom, the customs of the 'rustic rout of unpolished men.' And no one was readier to admit than Pascal that it is generally wiser to do as the Romans do, when one is in Rome. But why is it wise to do so? Ought one to see in custom a revelation of the voice of our great Mother—Nature? Pascal answered that no one did so. The man in the street deferred to the man in brocade, because he thought it reasonable to do so; when Rousseau explains to him that it is not, he will bring the brocade to the guillotine. The philosopher took off his hat, because he lived in a world of fools; and he thought that a little humouring of their follies was a small price to pay for peace. And with the philosopher sided the Christian, because he knew that subjection to these follies was God's punishment of man's transgressions. Thus everyone, except the *demi-savant*, took Montaigne's advice; but no one did so for the reason given in the 'Essays.' Why should men? What proof had Montaigne that custom was anything more than a bundle of haphazard usages consecrated by tradition? 'I'm very much afraid that Nature is only a first habit, just as habit is a second nature.' [1]

Besides, even a Libertine would hardly maintain that custom ought always and everywhere to be followed. How, then, distinguish between such instincts as were undoubted revelations of the voice of Nature and such as were not? How guard against the spells of the great goddess Imagination? 'She is the lying spirit in man, a mistress of error and deception, all the more treacherous because she is not so always; for she would be an infallible rule of truth, were she

[1] *Pens.* 93.

an unvarying liar. This proud enemy of reason delights to lord it over her foe, just to show how absolute is her power. She makes the intelligence doubt, affirm, deny. The senses wake or sleep at her bidding. She has her favourites and her wastrels, her rich and poor, her learned and unlearned; for, although she cannot give wisdom to a fool, she can make him happy. Men wise in their own conceit look down upon their fellows. They argue with boldness and assurance, whereas the truly prudent man is full of self-distrust. And their cheerfulness seldom fails to gain the approval of their hearers, so close is the bond between all self-opinionated men. Who but this capricious faculty decrees respect to persons, laws, achievements! How little can mere riches do without her consent! She is the mainspring of nearly all the actions of everyone; for reason is routed, and the wisest must fain take the caprices of his neighbours as his rule.'[1] Thus the fight between reason and custom has the same ending as the more abstract war between dogmatists and sceptics. Live by pure reason, and we become no better than *demi-savants*. Live by pure custom, and we put on the chains of the imagination—unless, indeed, we smuggle in reason to tell us when we obey custom and when to disobey it.

But is reason equal to this task? Can it make any headway at all against its 'proud enemy?' Pascal brings instance after instance to show how the imagination warps and discolours all our judgments. Ideas do not attract us because our intellect thinks them true, but because our imagination finds them piquantly new or picturesquely old. With most men reason goes to the wall, whenever their own interests are at stake; though a few scrupulous beings go to the opposite extreme, and cannot be persuaded to decide a point in their own favour. Set the greatest of philosophers on a plank above a precipice; his reason may tell him that

[1] *Pens.* 82.

he is safe, but his imagination will not believe it. We can scarcely see a barrister got up in gown and bands without feeling that he is the man to win our case. If doctors gave up riding about on mules, if professors threw aside their mortar-boards and robes, they would soon lose all hold on the world. Soldiers alone can dispense with these trappings, for they have force at their back. 'Think of the Sultan in his superb seraglio surrounded by forty thousand Janissaries. Pure indeed must be the reason that sees in him a mortal man.'[1] Nay, reason cannot even protect itself against external accidents. 'The mind of this sovereign judge of the Universe is not so free and independent but that it may be thrown off its balance by the slightest noise. You need not trouble to let off a cannon; a creaking weather-cock or a pulley would do quite as well. Don't wonder if he is a little incoherent. A fly is buzzing round his ears. If you want truth to dawn upon him, you must drive away the insect that holds the master-spirit of a realm at bay.'[2]

Still less can reason keep in check what Descartes would call the automatic side of our mind. The *demi-savants* talked as though all human nature was built on the pattern of Fontenelle, of whom Mme. de Tencin said that he had a second supplementary brain in the place where most people kept their heart. Most men are not Fontenelles. As well as a brain they have bones and muscles, blood and nerves; and these seldom answer at once to the rudder of pure reason. Yet reason cannot get on without them; Malebranche hit the nail on the head when he said that a pure idea had not strength of its own to pick a straw off the ground. If reason wishes to move the world it must not disdain the help of these humbler but more vigorous allies. But how is it to gain control of them? Pascal points to custom. Custom may not be as 'natural' as Montaigne supposed, but what is customary has an undoubted knack of becoming second

[1] *Pens.* 82. [2] *Pens.* 366.

nature. 'We must not misunderstand ourselves. We have a body as well as a mind; and therefore we are not swayed by proof alone. It merely appeals to the reason; whereas custom appeals to the senses, and these drag the understanding after them without giving it time to reflect. Hence we must look to custom for our deepest, strongest proofs. It has made many a Christian; it makes Turks and pagans; it determines walks in life. Intellectual convictions are worth little if the mechanical side of our nature is set in the opposite direction: we must gain over our whole self. So soon as we know where truth lies we must ask custom to soak and steep us in that belief. For we cannot always be carrying proofs about in our mind; it is much easier to believe by force of habit. This uses neither violence, nor artifice, nor argument; but all unconsciously it brings a certain bias into play, and into that our mind falls naturally.'[1]

On this principle Pascal will advise his free-thinker, at a certain stage in his conversion, to live as though he already were a Catholic. 'Have Masses said, and take holy water; naturally that will stupefy you, and make you believe.' This famous passage does not mean that a man may lawfully hocus himself into accepting a creed which he knows to be untrue; all Pascal maintains is that our 'machine'—our instincts, habits, associations—will never keep pace with our brain unless we call in custom to get them out of an old groove into a new one. For the same purpose we shall do well to make use of emotion. The *demi-savants* sneered at the passions; Pascal pronounced them a most valuable spur. Even love of applause was a tonic, so long as a man was not tempted to make it an end in itself. 'Abraham took nothing for himself, but only for his servants. So from the world and its plaudits the wise man takes nothing for himself, but only for his passions. Over them he is master. He says to them *Come* and *Go;*

[1] *Pens.* 252.

under thee shall be thy desire. Thus disciplined, they become virtues. God attributes to Himself avarice, jealousy, and wrath; these are just as much virtues as steadfastness, mercy, or long-suffering, which are also passions. We must treat them as slaves; we must leave them their rations, taking good care that these never reach the soul; for, if it eats of them it is poisoned.' [1]

If the passions must be slaves, who would be their task-master? Clearly the will—that is, the character acting as a whole, as distinct from the sporadic desires. How it was to bring them into subjection is explained at length by Pascal's contemporary, the Oratorian Senault. But Senault, following the usual practice of his time, drew an absolute distinction between the provinces of will and understanding. To form right judgments belonged to reason alone; will alone was answerable for putting them into execution. Reason, in short, was the Judge of Assize, will the High Sheriff. To Pascal this hard-and-fast division of function seemed utterly untrue to fact. Jansen had long ago taught him that the *Moi* and its inclinations lie at the root of our seemingly most dispassionate judgments: not that it actually dictates them, but it makes one argument appeal to us and another leave us cold. And we are powerless to protect ourselves, for we cannot put our finger on the spot where the influence of the will begins to tell. We do not even know that it is telling; we think that we are just as much guided by pure logic as does the suitor in Pascal's own 'Essay on Love.' Why is Cléonte so devoted to Lucile? Because he thinks her the most adorable of her sex. But, for all his friends can see, she is no better than twenty other girls. How has he managed to discover in her graces invisible to everyone else? He cannot say; all he knows is that the evidence of her charms is quite unmistakable to him. That being so, Pascal pronounces all the blessings of

[1] *Pens.* 502.

reason on his suit. He need not be discouraged if his friends fail to enter into his feelings. He himself would not have noticed half her attractions had not affection sharpened his eye-sight. On the other hand, these are none the less real, none the less valid proof at the bar of reason, because they are discovered to him by love instead of by objective scientific inquiry.

This principle once established, Pascal claims to have fulfilled the first part of his engagement. He has shown that religion is not irrational; it is no more superstitious to believe in God than to believe in Euclid. He has shown that the two great rivals of Christianity—the geometrical God of Descartes and the No-God of Montaigne—involve metaphysical difficulties at least as great as belief in the Gospel. He has shown that it is no argument against the truth of religion to say that many competent critics reject it. Pascal is perfectly willing to assume, so long as he is 'talking by the light of Nature,' that the arguments for and against the truth of Christianity evenly balance each other. Speaking from the purely intellectual standpoint, there are good reasons for believing in God, good reasons for rejecting Him; and neither side has a right to fling reproaches at its rival. Christians, indeed, will have a far deeper assurance of the truth of their religion than any Libertine can have of its falsity; but that assurance does not rest on logic, but on the miracle of conversion. Grace opens their eyes to the truths of faith, just as love—a carnal symbol of grace—opened the eyes of Cléonte to the charms of Lucile. Until God speaks decisively, however, these truths will remain as tentative and uncertain, as full of 'ambiguous ambiguities,' as any other branch of knowledge. Libertines asked why this should be so. Why did not God declare Himself plainly? Why did He not write His message to man across the face of the sun? A disciple of Saint Cyran was at no loss for an answer. 'God wishes to strengthen our will more than our

reason. Too great clearness would be agreeable enough to reason, but would slacken the fibres of our will. . . . Religion is so great a thing that it is only fair that those who will not take the trouble to seek should be forced to go without it.' [1]

How, then, persuade the free-thinker to seek? Plainly by persuading him that religion is 'worthy of respect, because it understands our nature, and desirable, because it does us good.' Why is it desirable, and how does it do us good? Pascal throws his answer into a form congenial to the gay young Libertines who hung round Miton and Méré. 'You must bet,' he says to them, 'for or against the existence of God!' The Libertine draws back; his reason tells him that there is much to be said on both sides of the question. Pascal answers that, if reason blows hot and cold, its utterances may be disregarded; but no one can afford to disregard his happiness. But our happiness depends on our conduct. We shall certainly live in one way if we believe that there is a God: we shall as certainly live in another if we doubt or deny his existence. The free-thinker declares it unreasonable to sacrifice the certain pleasures of this life to the bare chance of finding an avenging Deity in the next. 'But what do you lose by taking the risk?' asks Pascal. 'You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous—a staunch friend. It is true that you must give up various poisoned luxuries and pleasures: but will you not have others? I tell you, you will be a gainer, even in this life. At every step you take you will see that the gain is so certain, the sacrifice so small, that you will end by recognising that you have bought in a sure and infinite reversion for no price at all.' [2]

With this argument of the bet begins the second part of Pascal's Apology. Laplace and others have found fault with his calculations, and argued that the free-thinker's

[1] *Pens.* 574, 581. [2] *Pens.* 233.

chances of gain are by no means so great as Pascal would have him suppose. But Pascal is not asking him to gamble on the chance of one day securing a place in some 'ridiculous Paradise of the senses.' What he has undertaken to prove is that, even in this life, the shortest road to happiness lies through the gates of the Church. That this should be so is the strongest argument in favour of religion; for the desire of happiness is the fundamental fact in human nature. 'Despite all their miseries men wish to be happy. They cannot help wishing to be happy, and they wish for nothing else. But how are they to set about it? To succeed they must make themselves immortal; and that they cannot do. So they have made up their minds not to think about their mortality at all.'[1] Pascal now sets himself to show that this resolve is easier to make than to accomplish. Men cannot help 'thinking about their mortality' however much Montaigne and Saint Évremond may try to prevent them. The death's-head has a way of forcing its grisly presence into every feast. 'It is a horrible thing to feel all we have slipping from us bit by bit.' 'Between us and an eternity of weal or woe there is only life, the frailest plank in the world.' Think of a number of men in chains, all lying under sentence of death. Every day a few are slaughtered within sight of the rest. These look at each other in utter despair, as they stand waiting their turn. That is a picture of the condition of man.'[2]

Bitter as these reflections may be to the individual palate, they taste still more bitterly to mankind at large. 'Man was created only for infinity,' wrote Pascal in a youthful scientific pamphlet: but where look for infinity in a race poised for a moment on the crust of a ball of fire? To doubt immortality was far more than an ecclesiastical heresy; it implicitly denied that life could offer any value, meaning, purpose. Hence, Pascal has many a hard word for the

[1] *Pens.* 169. [2] *Pens.* 199, 212, 213.

philosophers who pretend to make morality independent of the problem whether there is a future life. How can any man leave that an open question? 'It needs no very noble heart to see that here below there is no sure resting-place for us. Our pleasures are vain, our miseries infinite; while death, which threatens us every moment, brings with it the horrible alternative of eternal nothingness or eternal woe. Play the hero as much as we like, that is the end which awaits the most brilliant career. Ponder the matter, and who will deny that the one real good this life can offer is the hope of a hereafter? There is no sorrow for those who have a firm faith in immortality; there is no happiness for those who have not this assurance.' [1]

Men only manage to forget the truth by living a life of long-drawn self-deception. 'We head straight for the rocks after we have put something in front of them to keep them out of sight.' [2] Even age and experience seldom tear the blinkers from our eyes. 'It strikes me that Cæsar was too old to start conquering the world. That amusement was all very well for lads like Alexander or Augustus, but at Cæsar's age he should have known better.' [3] He had lived long enough to see what Dead Sea apples such conquests are. Even if we lay hold of them for a moment the most trumpery accident is enough to dash them from our hand. 'Cromwell had Christendom at his mercy. The Royal Family would have been for ever lost, and his own seated firmly on the throne, had not a little grain of sand settled in his passages.' [4] Ridiculous as was his end, other masters of the world fared even worse than he. His fall, at any rate, was due to accident, not to his own folly; whereas Mark Antony deliberately threw himself away for a trifle hardly less contemptible than a grain of sand. 'To plumb the very depths of man's futility it is only necessary to consider the

[1] *Pens.* 194.
[2] *Pens.* 183.
[3] *Pens.* 132.
[4] *Pens.* 176.

causes and effects of love. Corneille calls its cause a "je ne sais quoi"; yet this little insignificant "je ne sais quoi" is enough to plunge kingdoms into war. The world would wear a different face if Cleopatra's nose had been a little shorter.'[1]

Yet schemes of conquest continue to haunt great minds and small. Life is one long meaningless scurry hither and thither. 'We never keep a tight hold on the present. We seize the future by the fore-lock as though to hasten its approach; or else we recall the past to check the swiftness of its flight. Our thoughtless folly rambles through ages that do not belong to us and neglects the only one with which we have any concern. We never make the present our aim. Past and present are our means: our end is the future. We do not live: we only hope one day to do so. And, inasmuch as all our time is spent in getting ready to be happy, it follows that we never are so.'[2] So blind are we that we do not see that success would prove our ruin. We do not care for things once they are ours; what we enjoy is running after them. The excitement of the chase is worth far more to us than the kill. Why is this? 'Musing over the different ways men spend their time, and the pains and perils they affront, I hit on the discovery that all their miseries spring from the fact that they cannot stay quietly in a room. A man of good fortune would never cross the sea could he but be happy at home; commissions in the army would fetch a lower price, routs and gaming-tables be less thronged, did men find their own fire-side more tolerable. But when I looked closely into the matter, I found that they had some show of reason on their side; for we should sink beneath the wretchedness of our frail mortal state were it always present to our mind. That is why men crave so madly for bustle and amusement; that is why prison is so terrible a punishment, and the pleasures of solitude beyond our understanding. Hence, when we reproach them for

[1] *Pens.* 162. [2] *Pens* 172.

their futility, our censures are apt to go wide of the mark. Their fault does not lie in seeking distraction for its own sake: it lies in supposing that they would be happy if only they could reach the shadows they pursue. They seek repose by overcoming obstacles—only to find that, when the obstacles are overcome, repose is unendurable. But, even if their path were altogether clear of stumbling-blocks, ennui would still assert its indefeasible right of entry. Out of its lair in the heart it would creep, and scatter venom over the whole face of things. Such is man's misery, that the very law of his being forces tedium upon him, even when no obvious cause of tedium is at hand. Such is his frivolity, that the veriest trifle—as for instance, pushing a billiard-ball with a cue—is enough to distract his thoughts.'[1]

So notorious is our discontent that the Libertines often take it as their text, when they inveigh against the dignity of human nature, and degrade it below the level of the beasts. These stand in no need of distraction; as Father Garasse's tormentors said—they browse peacefully along, enjoying the fruits of Nature's bounty as they go. Pascal answers that the Libertine argument proves too much. The beasts are not wretched, because they are dumb unreasoning brutes. Man is wretched because he is something more than a brute. The beasts do not seek distraction, because they are in the state that Nature appointed for them. Man seeks distraction because he is not in his rightful state; but he seeks in vain because he does not know what his true state is. Looked at in one light his craving for amusement is contemptibly absurd; looked at in another, it bears witness to the strength of an ideal stirring half-consciously within him. Even his vices tell the same tale. At first sight what could seem more ignobly infra-human than his vanity? 'Horses,' says the Libertine, 'do not admire themselves or their stable-

[1] *Pens.* 139.

companions. They may feel a little jealousy on the race-track, but that soon passes off. The slower and heavier animal never gives up its oats to the faster, as men expect their fellows to do. At the manger virtue is its own reward.' [1] Now cast a glance at the horse's rider. 'We are never satisfied with appearing to be what we really are: we want to live a fictitious existence in the minds of our neighbours—that is why we pose. We spend endless pains on embellishing our imaginary self, and we let the real one go to the wall. Indeed, we would do ourselves any violence rather than that it should suffer. There is no act of cowardice we would not commit if we could thereby gain a reputation for valour.' 'Vanity has struck such deep roots in our heart that a common soldier, a hodman, a scullion, a ticket-porter rates himself highly, and must have his admirers. So also must philosophers. And those who write tracts against vain-glory must have the glory of having written well. And those who read the tracts must have the glory of having read well. And perhaps I, who write this, have the same desire. And perhaps my readers——?' 'We are so presumptuous that we wish our name known all over the world, even by generations still to come. At the same time we are so petty that we are satisfied with the applause of half a dozen cronies.' [2]

All this Pascal fully admitted. But he went on to urge that even vanity could show a redeeming touch. 'The worst trait in man is his thirst for glory, but it is also the chief mark of his excellence. Whatever degree of health, comfort, riches he enjoys, he is not happy, unless he stands well with his fellows. So great is his respect for human reason, that its approval seems to him the greatest honour there can be. Nothing can stop him from desiring it; this is the most ineradicable of our instincts. And even those who feel the most contempt for man, and liken him

[1] *Pens.* 401. [2] *Pens.* 147, 148, 150.

to the brutes, look eagerly for his applause, and thus give the lie to their own sneers; for their nature, which always has the last word, speaks up more strongly for his grandeur than does their reason for his littleness.' [1] Nor was it only on this point that the Libertines betrayed the interests of their cause; on all sides their practice was the best answer to their preaching. They passed their lives in pouring scorn on reason and moral austerity; yet into this crusade against ideals they threw an energy and devotion worthy of Du Vair himself. Pascal was the first to admit that 'extraordinary greatness of soul' was needed to make a Montaigne. 'A certain kind of evil is almost as difficult as good, and for that reason is often mistaken for it.' [2] What was all this but saying that there is an inexpugnable element of inborn dignity in man? Perverse ingenuity may force it to find unnatural outlets, but no amount of ingeunity can stop it from rising to the surface.

Still, saying that Montaigne went wrong was by no means saying that his Stoic adversaries were right. They took for granted that the grandeur of man more than outweighed his littleness. Come what might he could always master his passions and ignore the buffetings of fate, since nothing could force his reason to believe what it knew to be untrue or his will to love what it knew would be to its hurt. But the 'Augustinus' had made an end of this 'devilish arrogance' once for all; and Pascal will claim that all human experience bears out the truth of Jansen's theology. 'What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I,' is the last word on human nature. In this world men cannot be good or happy; they cannot help wishing to be both. They will still go on forming ideals, however much Montaigne may try to prevent them; they will still turn back from the plough, whatever Epictetus and Du Vair may say to urge them forward. Following the usual practice of

[1] *Pens.* 404. [2] *Pens.* 408.

their kind, each school of philosophers has seen one half of the truth, and shut its eyes to the other. 'Finding that our soul is the seat of an endless war between reason and the passions, lovers of peace have split up into two rival factions. Some have tried to crush their passions, and become as gods; others have wished to stifle their reason, and live like brute beasts. But they have none of them succeeded. Reason remains as an accusing spirit, to harass the peace of those who give way to their passions; and the passions still remain alive in those most anxious to renounce them.' [1] Thus does philosophy forfeit all claim to be 'worthy of respect because it understands our nature.' Neither Stoics nor Epicureans can explain the paradox of man—why he is alike 'the judge of all things and a worm of earth, the treasury of truth and a sink of errors, the pride and refuse of the Universe.'

So from the philosophers Pascal turned suddenly away to religion. Original Sin can alone account for the endless contradictions of our nature. Had we not fallen from a higher estate we should not know that we were wretched. Pain and death would not appear as 'miseries of a great lord, miseries of an exiled king': they would seem as natural to us as they do to the beasts. That we might ourselves be beasts engaged in slowly and painfully ravelling off our bestiality was an hypothesis that Pascal did not deign to consider. Ideas of evolution and development had not yet spread beyond the strictly scientific field; nor will they ever find much favour with the conscience of Port Royal. To speak of progress is to call up the idea of a strong man battling with external obstacles. But to the Puritan sin is far too awful a reality to be dismissed as a mere external obstacle. The evil does not lie in things: its seat is within his own heart. Not for him is the 'Justum et tenacem propositi' of Epictetus and Du Vair. He does

[1] *Pens.* 413.

not stand erect amid the ruins of a falling world. He is a house arrayed against itself. If one side of his nature is the strong man struggling, another side is the traitor in the camp. Necessarily, therefore, he looks on himself as depraved rather than as simply imperfect; and the legend of Adam's Fall supplies him with an explanation of this depravity. 'Strange as it may seem,' says Pascal, 'the one thing that throws light on the riddle of our nature is the unfathomable mystery of the transmission of guilt. Certainly it shocks our reason. Nothing runs more counter to the principles of our miserable justice than eternally to damn a child incapable of reason for a crime committed six thousand years before its birth. Yet without this most incomprehensible of mysteries we are incomprehensible to ourselves. The whole warp and woof of our nature twists and twines round this abyss; so that man is more inconceivable without this mystery than the mystery is inconceivable to him.' [1]

But religion is much more than 'worthy of respect because it understands our nature': it is also 'desirable because it does us good.' Thereby it scores a final triumph over the philosophers. Blinded by their respective half-truths, these refuse to recognise the double element in man. The Stoics, on principle, ignore his dignity, and they are eaten up by pride. The Epicureans overlook his weakness, and they sink into an ignoble listlessness and sloth. 'The Christian religion alone can cope with these two opposite vices. It does not need to play off one against the other, as would the wisdom of the world: the simplicity of the Gospel drives out both alike. For, although it brings the righteous into the Presence of God Himself, it teaches that they are still subject to corruption, to error and misery, sin and death; while to the worst of sinners it declares that they are still capable of receiving the Grace of their Redeemer.

[1] *Pens.* 434.

Thus nicely does it temper hope and fear. It gives cause for trembling to all whom it justifies, and cause for comfort to all whom it condemns. It exalts man far higher than does the pride of Nature, yet does not puff him up ; it abases him far lower than does reason, yet bids him not despair.' [1]

Thereby Christianity distinguishes itself not only from philosophy, but also from other religions. Pascal's glance wanders for a moment over its chief rivals : the Stoical God of Epictetus and Du Vair, the geometrical God of Descartes, the Providence of Israel—' supreme Disposer of the lives and fortunes of men Who crowns His worshippers with length of days.' What do such Divinities care about the miseries of man ? To Epictetus, to Descartes, to the Rabbis these are mere despicable accidents, not an integral part of his nature. But Christianity is expressly founded on a recognition of his wretchedness. ' The Incarnation is a measure of the greatness of our need by the greatness of the remedy for which it called.' [2] So far from overlooking our miseries its one object is to cure them. ' Jesus Christ did little but tell men that they loved themselves, that they were slaves and sinners, blind and sick. Therefore He must heal and deliver them, must enlighten and restore ; and to this end they must hate themselves and follow Him through affliction to the death of the Cross.'[3] Thereby our miseries are more than recognised, more than cured. By the Incarnation of the Man of Sorrows pain is actually taken up into the Godhead. So far from being an obstacle to fellowship it becomes the strongest link between man and his Maker. ' O God, Who so lovest bodies exercised by suffering,' wrote Pascal in his youthful ' Prayers in Sickness,' ' be pleased to accept my body—not for its own sake, nor for anything it contains, for all deserves Thy wrath—but for the evils it endures, which alone deserve Thy Love.'

[1] *Pens.* 435. [2] *Pens.* 526. [3] *Pens.* 545.

Thenceforward Pascal's whole argument centres in the Person of the Redeemer. God the Father is a bare idea, an abstract Essence of Divinity endlessly remote from us; as the German philosophers say, He is 'keine dramatische Person.' But in the Son the Divinity is humanised without ceasing to be God. 'We only know God through Jesus Christ. Without this Mediator all intercourse with God is broken off. All those who have tried to prove God independently of Jesus Christ have been grievously hampered in their task. Without Scripture, without Original Sin, without the promise of a Mediator and its fulfilment, we can have no convincing proof of God, no sound doctrine or morality. But by Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ we can prove God; we have a doctrine and a moral law. Therefore Jesus Christ is the true God of men.'[1] Nay, He is the only God of men. To Him the Father has made over all authority and power: whatever is accepted by the One becomes acceptable to the Other. 'God only regards mankind in Jesus Christ. . . . Our prayers and virtues are abominable before God, unless they are the prayers of Jesus Christ.' Through Him alone the Universe gians a meaning. 'After all, the sceptics are right. Before Jesus Christ came men did not know where they stood nor whether they were great or small. . . . Not only do we only know God through Jesus Christ: we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we can put no meaning on life or death or God or ourselves.'[2]

Pascal is now ready to approach the third part of his undertaking. Hitherto he has only proved that religion is 'desirable because it does us good.' It was still possible for a Libertine to turn round and say that what seemed desirable was not necessarily true. How, then, prove the truth of religion? Or rather, since religion centred in the Divinity of Christ, how prove that Jesus Christ was God?

[1] *Pens.* 547. [2] *Pens.* 432, 548.

Clearly the simplest way of doing this was to show that the Redeemer's appearance on earth set aside the laws of Nature in some strikingly miraculous way. For this reason many divines have insisted on the Virgin Birth of Jesus; and Pascal turned aside for a moment to bring some startling physiological arguments in its support.[1] But these only made the miracle a little more easy of belief to those already inclined to accept it; they had small weight with a free-thinker. Will, then, Pascal anticipate Bossuet by writing a 'Discourse on Universal History' to show that 'Jesus Christ is the goal of all things and the centre to which all tend?' Some such idea, perhaps, flitted through his mind. 'Grand it is for the eye of faith to see Darius and Cyrus, Alexander, the Romans, Pompey and Herod, working without their knowledge for the glory of the Gospel.'[2] But there is little room for the miraculous in a universal history; there the 'thunder-bolts and visible upsets of Grace' soon fade away in the glare of natural origins and causes. Even Bossuet ended by admitting that it was the will of God that every great event should have its roots in the ages that went before it. Hence, if Pascal wished to have convincing proofs of a miracle, he must look elsewhere.

He found what he wanted in the history of the Jews. Thanks to Israel, and Israel alone, the true God had always been worshipped since the beginning of time. And, since the Old Law was only a foreshadowing of the New, it follows that, in a certain sense, Christianity is 'as old as the Creation.' From this premise Matthew Tindal and the Deists will presently infer that it is not miraculous; Pascal draws a precisely opposite conclusion. That religion should always have existed is due to nothing less than one continual miracle. And the miracle is fitly enshrined in the history of the Jews. In all respects they are unique. They are at once the oldest and the most indestructible of races. 'The

[1] *Pens.* 222. [2] *Pens.* 701.

peoples of Greece and Italy, of Sparta, Athens, Rome, came into being long after them, and have long been gone. But the Jews remain, although great kings have a hundred times compassed their destruction.'[1] Under Louis XIV they still continue, always a tribe apart and always in misery. 'They continue because their survival is necessary to the proof of Jesus Christ; they are in misery because they crucified Him.'[2] Wherever they go they carry with them a Book utterly unlike the work of any other writer. 'Homer avowedly wrote a romance, and everybody took it to be such. How very different is this book, written to amuse a people, from a Book that makes a people!'[3] For the Book of the Jews contains their Law; and that Law is at once the oldest, the best, and the most lasting that the world has ever seen. 'Josephus *against Apion*, and Philo the Jew, in various places show that it is so ancient that the very word *law* did not come into use for a thousand years after its institution. It is so perfect that the greatest Greek and Roman law-givers borrowed from it, as is shown by what they call the Twelve Tables, and other cases quoted by Josephus. But the strange thing is that it is also the hardest and sternest of all laws, imposing on its votaries all manner of irksome and peculiar observances under pain of death. All the more wonder that so headstrong and rebellious a people should have kept it so strictly for hundreds of years. Other States have much milder laws, and yet are always changing them.'[4] Pascal is quick to point the moral. 'The one religion that has always been before the world is also the only one that runs directly counter to the common sense and the natural inclinations of man.'[5] And what is that but one continual miracle?

Still, Israel did much more than bear witness to the vitality of the religious instinct in general; its special

[1] *Pens.* 620. [2] *Pens.* 640. [3] *Pens.* 628.
[4] *Pens.* 620. [5] *Pens.* 605.

mission was to prove Jesus Christ. Judaism was saturated through and through with the two doctrines that Pascal declares to constitute 'almost the whole of Christianity'—the fall of man in Adam, and his deliverance by a Redeemer. Passages from the Old Testament affirming the first point were easy enough to find; and a French divine having lately edited the 'Pugio Fidei'—a defence of Christianity against the Jews and Arabs written by Raymond Martin, a medieval Spanish friar learned in Cabbalistic lore—Pascal scoured it for proofs that the doctrine of Original Sin never died out among the Rabbis. Naturally, however, the Messianic tradition took up the chief part of his attention. That the Jews had always expected a Deliverer was a highly significant fact. But they had done more than expect; a long chain of their prophets had foretold the time and manner of his coming. What if it could be shown that their prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ? That would be enough of a miracle to impress the most inveterate free-thinker. 'Suppose a single man had left behind him a book predicting when and how Jesus Christ would come: that, in itself, would be an argument of infinite force. But there is much more here. For four thousand years a whole succession of prophets follow each other in foretelling His advent. For four thousand years a whole people is His harbinger, and bears corporate witness to a hope and expectation beyond the power of any threats or persecutions to shake.'[1]

Now, however, arose a difficulty. The prophecies announced the coming of a great temporal Prince. Pascal accordingly spent much time in showing that they were unintelligible, unless understood in a purely figurative sense; and that Jansen was right in saying that the whole Old Testament, *magna quaedam quasi comoedia*, was simply an allegorical foreshadowing of the New. The Ark, the

[1] *Pens.* 710.

passage through the Red Sea, the fat land of Canaan were not intended as Divine favours to the Jews; their only aim and object was to be a parable of Redemption. Why, then, did the Jews understand them in a literal sense? Because their mind was set on carnal things. They were as little able to enter into the spirit of true religion as were Escobar and the carnal Catholics, who thought that their Messiah had brought them sacraments that made them holy without any effort of their own. 'One and the same veil hangs over Scripture for Jews, bad Christians, and all who do not hate themselves. But how easy it is for those who do hate themselves to understand Scripture, and know Jesus Christ!' [1] Thus to be rejected of the Jews was only an added proof in favour of the true Messiah. 'Thereby they put the crowning stroke on His glory. Their only reason for refusing Him—the only reason given by the Talmud and the Rabbis—was that He did not subdue the nations by force of arms. Is that all they have to say? "He failed and died," they answer; "He did not vanquish the heathen, and enrich us with their spoil." Is that all they have to say? That is the very reason why I love Him. I would not have the Messiah of their fancy.' [2]

Thus the history of Israel was fraught with a terrible warning to Escobar and his like. Well might they ask themselves whether they also had not mistaken the figurative for the literal sense of things, and performed all the external duties of Catholicism without possessing one spark of Christianity. But why should either Jews or Christians be exposed to such a risk? Why did not God speak out more plainly? Because the business of religion was to try the heart and reins, and thereby separate spiritual from carnal minds. Hence the great stumbling-blocks in the way of belief were not intellectual, but moral. 'The prophecies, miracles, and other proofs of our religion cannot

[1] *Pens.* 676. [2] *Pens.* 760.

be called absolutely convincing. On the other hand, it is impossible to say that there is no reason for believing them. The evidence in their favour is stronger—or, at any rate, as strong—as the evidence against them. Hence, if we refuse to accept them, the fault does not lie with our reason, but with the selfish ill-will of our heart. Thus there is proof enough to condemn, but not enough to convince; and therefore there can be no denying that belief is determined by Grace, not reason, and unbelief by wickedness.' [1] Nor were matters bettered when the bare evidence was beyond all doubt. Reason might grapple successfully with the purely intellectual aspects of a spiritual truth, but no amount of reason could save a man from mistaking its figurative for its literal sense. 'God caused the Messiah to be foretold in such a way that the righteous would certainly recognise Him, and the ungodly would not. Had the manner of His coming been clearly predicted there would not have been darkness enough to mislead the wicked. Had the time been predicted obscurely there would not have been clearness enough, even for the righteous. Hence the time was expressly foretold, but the manner wrapped in figures. Thus the wicked are deceived, for they were on the watch for carnal blessings; but the good are not deceived. For to discriminate the kind of blessings promised is the work of the heart; but the interpretation of the time announced does not depend on the heart.' [2]

If this principle was a sentence of condemnation to many, it was also the culminating proof of the truth of Christianity. Would a false creed dare to admit that its evidences were only intelligible to holy and humble men of heart? 'Here,' cries Pascal's Libertine, 'I find an answer to every objection. It is right that so pure a God should only reveal Himself to those whose hearts are purified. Henceforward this religion will be loveable to me; so divine an ethic is

[1] *Pens.* 564. [2] *Pens.* 758.

enough of itself to guarantee its truth. But I find much more than this. Ever since the dawn of history men have been constantly told that they were altogether sunk in sin, but that a Redeemer would one day come to them. This was not the tale of a single dreamer; it was vouched for by a whole people, created expressly to testify to this truth for four thousand years. The more I study its prophecies the more truth I find in them. Their interlacing chains of proof—this religion with its authority, its continuance, its changelessness, its moral law, its doctrines, its history, its effects—seem to me divine. And so I stretch out my arms to my Redeemer, Who, having been foretold for four thousand years, has come to suffer on earth for me at the time and in the manner appointed. By His grace I wait peacefully for death, in the hope of being for ever united to Him. Meanwhile I live cheerfully among the good things He has been pleased to give me, or else among the evil things He has sent me for my soul's sake, having first taught me by His own example how to bear with them.' [1]

[1] *Pens.* 737.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER THE APOLOGY

'If what I have said strikes you as impressive,' says Pascal to his Libertine, 'bear in mind that it comes from one who knelt beforehand and afterwards in prayer to the Infinite Being to whom he commits all his ways. It was to ask that He would take you also into His keeping, and that His strength might come to the rescue of your weakness.' The peculiar note of Pascal's Apology is that it is an incomparable sermon on the duty of pursuing religion for its own sake; all his opponents were men who insisted on adulterating it with noxiously foreign ingredients, either metaphysical, utilitarian, or aesthetic. In the seventeenth century such adulteration was widespread enough. Ask an average intelligent Frenchman why he believed in God, and he would probably answer that it was because Descartes or Bossuet or Antoine Arnauld had placed His existence beyond all shadow of doubt. In other words, he pinned his faith to a logical demonstration; and the eminent divines aforesaid were quite content that he should do so. Arnauld was always singing the praises of logic as a useful mental discipline: by promoting intellectual seriousness it served to Christianise the understanding. And he thought that solid disquisitions on the attributes of God did much to check the common belief that intellectual feebleness and piety always went hand in hand. Pascal preached a very different gospel. Loyalty to his official leader might put a certain

guard on his lips, but the real drift of his Apology was to argue that metaphysical theology was as 'useless and uncertain' as universal mechanism itself. It was uncertain, because the best it could offer was a string of pure ideas of very pinchbeck metal; in the divinity schools, as elsewhere, Reason had a terrible knack of confounding the dogmatist, and Nature the sceptic. It was useless, because matters would have been little bettered if all its ideas had been of the finest gold; Pascal was quite of Malebranche's opinion—that pure reason had not strength enough of its own to pick a straw off the ground. Academic triflers might pretend to make it the basis of their faith; but a man really in earnest about his soul knew that it was not.

What, then, was the real driving-wheel of belief? 'Religious experience,' answers a modern psychologist, 'lies not in seeking to understand God, but in feeding upon Him, in finding refreshment and strength in Him, in rejoicing in Him. God is not understood by the religious consciousness: He is used. So long as he proves Himself useful His right to remain in the service of man is unchallenged; the religious consciousness asks for no more. Does God really exist? How does He exist? What is He? are so many irrelevant questions.' To Pascal such questions seemed much worse than merely irrelevant. He argued that a man's religion depended on his conception of God, on seeing Him in a right perspective; and practical piety fixed that perspective when it gave him a God who could be used. But philosophy brought into play a wholly different standard of values: its business was to settle what was logically consistent, not what was spiritually uplifting. Its votaries were more than chary of an appeal to the heart. Set it to work on the idea of God, and the heavenly Father froze at once into a metaphysical abstraction 'Author of geometrical truths and the Order of the Elements.' No doubt even this Divinity might rouse feelings of devotion, but they were

not the feelings in fashion at Port Royal. Nor was it possible to combine the two conceptions of God: as well unite in a single picture the effect of snow-laden November clouds and a warm August sun. Worldlings, who seldom thought of God, might pass without effort to and fro from one conception of Him to the other; but the hermits of Port Royal, who had Him ever before their eyes, must see Him ever in one light. At all times He must be to them the Father Who heard prayer, to whom all flesh must come.

Hence arose Pascal's intense dislike not only to metaphysical proofs of God, but to scientific theology of every kind. 'Truth without Charity,' he cried, 'is not God. It is His graven image; it is an idol, that must not be loved or adored.' How, then, wean men from this idolatry? Plainly by showing that metaphysical theology was following a will-o'-the-wisp. Its enthusiasts supposed that logic held the key to all the great riddles of life. They supposed that it could tell them whether there were a God, or whether Racine were a greater poet than Corneille, just as surely as it told them that the three angles of a triangle were together equal to two right angles. Pascal answered that logic could do nothing of the kind. It might help a man to explain why he liked 'Phèdre' better than the 'Cid'; it could not tell him which of the two was the better play. His judgment on that point would depend on an intuitive preference already in his mind; and the most logic could hope to do was to translate that intuitive perference into words. But where did the preference itself originate? Clearly in the mysterious region which Pascal called the heart. But could the heart's likes and dislikes be reduced to law? Pascal felt very doubtful: all he could say was that the heart had reasons of its own, of which Reason had no knowledge. But, if Reason could not understand the heart, the heart knew very well how to make a blind tool of Reason. Has not Pascal explained at length how everyone's judgments are in the

last resort dictated by his *Moi?* Upholders of truth without Charity sought to evade this consequence by establishing a common measure of minds, where propositions might be made equally convincing to all beings of equal rationality. In mathematics they succeeded, on other fields they failed. How set up, for instance, a common measure of minds between Cléonte and his friends over the question of Lucile? They did not disagree, because he was more—or less—logical than they; they differed, because his love discovered in her a thousand graces, to which their dispassionate eyes were blind. Apply this reasoning to religion, and 'truth without Charity' at once became a grotesque absurdity.

But if a man were born without Charity, could he call it into being? Clearly that was quite impossible, and Pascal fell back on a doctrine of absolute Predestination. 'Men understand nothing of the ways of God unless they grasp the principle that He has been pleased to enlighten some and darken the eyes of others.' Fénelon and the free-will divines might cry out against this as a blasphemous parody of God's justice; Pascal answered that all human experience bore out the lessons of the 'Augustinus.' Men unquestionably varied much in their capacity for receiving religion. Some souls were naturally Christian: as Dr. Chalmers told Carlyle—the preacher's message was already written on their heart in sympathetic ink, and needed but the heat of his words to be brought out in letters of flame. Others answered slowly and with difficulty to the touch of Grace; others again, of whom Miton was one, remained amiably indifferent to the most strenuous appeals. What was the cause of this divergence? Plainly a fundamental difference of character. But could characters be changed? Miton's certainly could not; irreligious he had lived, and irreligious he would die. Hence, in Jansen's language, it was true to say that Christ had not died for him. But when the temperament was fluid—when the spiritual instinct,

though weak, was undoubtedly alive—was it always wise to tell men that Christ had not died for them? 'If you tell them that He did not die for all,' says Pascal to his leaders, 'you play on one of their vices; for they at once apply the exception to themselves, and fall into despair. It would be much better to turn their eyes in the opposite direction and encourage hope.'[1] But was it not a mockery to talk of hope in connexion with Predestination? Not at all. Christians could not, indeed, convert themselves. 'Grace alone can turn a man into a saint; and those who doubt this do not know what is meant either by a saint or a man.'[2] But could not men in a measure forestall the thunder-claps of Grace? Certainly they could. Conversion meant a change of character, a new orientation of desires; it meant a capacity for preferring 'things invisible, but real'; to 'things visible, but vain.' But this capacity was largely a fruit of habit: 'exterior practices accustom us to interior virtues.' That was why men should take holy water, and live as though a God existed. 'You say that if you had faith you would soon give up your pleasures. I answer that, if you gave up your pleasures, you would soon have faith.'[3]

Critics have sometimes seen in this attitude an approximation to orthodox doctrines of free will; and Pascal certainly departed a little from the strict standards of his party when he maintained that conversion could be invited by a man's own efforts. But the real question at issue between Jansen and Molina was not whether conversion might be, in a certain measure, self-caused: it was whether conversion did, or did not, imply a violent break with the past. Libertarians maintained that grace grew up out of Nature by imperceptible gradations. As Fénelon said, it was a hidden germ, implanted in the soul at birth, and only distinguishable from Reason when it began to put

[1] *Pens.* 781. [2] *Pens.* 508. [3] *Pens.* 240.

forth buds and roots. Necessitarians, on the other hand, denied that conversion was effected in this 'silent, secret, gradual, and insensible manner'; it was 'always accompanied by manifest evidences of supernatural power, wonderfully and suddenly causing a great change.' So Grace had come to St. Paul, 'model of all penitents'; so it had come to St. Augustine; so it had come to Pascal himself. And the whole manner of its coming set human conventions at defiance. So far from being continuous—as Fénelon would have the world believe—spiritual progress was a series of violent contrasts, a *renversement continuel du pour au contre.* 'God has set up His supernatural Order in violent contrast to the Order that should be natural among men. He wills that Divine Truth should reach the brain through the heart, and not the heart through the brain; for He wishes to crush the arrogance of Reason, which claims to determine what the will should believe, and to cure the infirmities of a will corrupted by its unclean appetites. Thus it is that, in speaking of earthly things, we say that they must be known in order to be loved; but, when the saints speak of heavenly things, they say that they must be loved in order to be known, and that we only reach truth through Charity.'[1]

Hence the necessity of approaching religion in a spirit of unquestioning docility. 'Wisdom sends us back to infancy: "Be ye as little children."' Fénelon and his friends supposed that religion meant the culmination of a ripening progress begun in the natural order; Pascal answered that it stood for the bursting into our lives of a factor altogether new. Conversion brought the Christian into an Order of Charity 'infinitely farther removed from mind than was mind from matter': hence the absurdity of measuring it by charts and compasses borrowed from the realms of mind. They could no more grasp its secrets

[1] *Esprit Géométrique, Works*, iii. p. 175.

than our common-sense impressions—as Pascal had long ago learnt at the Paris Club—can grasp the actual physical processes of Nature. 'In the world of sensory experience new-sprung grass is green, wood hard, ice cold, and toothache painful. In the world of reasoning science there is no green, no colour at all, only certain lengths of vibration; no hardness, but a certain reaction of molecules; no cold or pain, but certain molecular consequences that reach the misinterpreting mind.' But the natural order could not realise how far it carried this process of misinterpretation. It persisted in imagining that it stood to the supernatural order much as the pupils of Van Dyck stood to their master. Mind evolved the general outlines of an answer to the riddle of existence; then came in Charity, to give a few deft touches to mind's laborious spade-work and transform it into a speaking picture of the Universe.

Pascal, on the other hand, denied that the lucubrations of mind possessed any value whatsoever unless they were informed by religion. 'Apart from Jesus Christ, we can put no meaning on life or death, or God, or ourselves.' Both mind and matter were mere shadows of reality; they were *magna quædam comœdia*, as Jansen said of the Old Testament. The convert's first step was to recognise that their only aim and object was to mirror the movements of the Order of Charity. Hitherto he had valued the world's conquerors for their exploits; now he saw that they were only of interest, in so far as they 'strove without their knowledge for the glory of the Gospel.' And what was true of Darius and Cyrus was still more true of Plato and Archimedes, Galileo, and Montaigne. Without their knowledge they adumbrated many a truth of Christianity; but they no more grasped its full reality than our common-sense impressions can grasp the real significance of new-sprung grass or toothache. Thus entrance into the Order of Charity brought with it an *Umwertung aller Werte*. The

convert was cut loose from all his intellectual moorings; overboard must go received ideas of truth, of beauty, grandeur, right, and wrong. But so radical a mental upheaval was only made possible by the thunderclaps of Grace. 'We must look on ourselves like criminals in a prison hung round with images of our Redeemer, and with instructions how to break our bonds,' wrote Pascal in a youthful letter to his sister Gilberte. 'But we cannot read those holy characters aright without assistance from Above; for just as all things speak of God to those who know Him, and discover Him to those who love, so also do they veil Him from those who know him not.' Thus, in the last resort, the search for religion meant a plunge into an unknown sea; and Pascal's famous metaphor of the bet turns out to be no more than his doctrine of conversion adapted to the understanding of the gay young Libertines who hung round Miton and Méré.

> Du musst glauben, Du musst wagen,
> Denn die Götter leihn kein Pfand.
> Nur ein Wunder kann Dich tragen
> In das schöne Wunderland.

Still, all could not be left to miracle. The Jansenist craving for 'assurance' demanded that the Christian Columbus should have some tangible guarantee that his helm was set straight for the New World. Hence Pascal set himself to correct the great error of commonplace Catholic apologists. They spoke as though faith meant a 'submission of the intellect,' a gulping down of propositions in the teeth of proof; whereas really it did not imply a breach with Reason, so much as a transcending of Reason. 'Faith certainly tells us many things which the senses do not perceive; it never tells us the contrary of what they see. It is above, and not against them.'[1] But was a man justified in going beyond them? Yes; for Reason itself

[1] *Pens.* 265.

made exceedingly clear that the answer to the problem of existence must be sought beyond its borders. 'We yearn for truth, and find nothing but uncertainty. We seek happiness, and light only on misery and death. We cannot help craving for truth and happiness; we cannot attain to either. This desire was left in us partly as a punishment and partly as a spur to goad us out of the state into which we have fallen.' [1] Reason could recognise that religion offered not only a plausible explanation of this fall, but also a means of recovery. 'Live as though a God existed, and you will be a gainer, even in this life,' said Pascal to his Libertine. 'You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous—a staunch friend.' The manner of the soul's awakening would, indeed, remain a mystery; for all experience proved that it was violent, cataclysmic, rich in thunder-claps and visible upsets. But, if Reason could not follow their workings it was fully capable of gauging their practical effect. 'Two points alone make up almost the whole of Christianity: the fall of man in Adam, and his redemption through Jesus Christ.' All those who had been torn in two between 'things visible, but vain, and things invisible, but real' had had experience of the first; all those, in whom the things invisible had gained the final victory, had been vouchsafed the second. As in Adam they had died, even so in Christ they were now made alive.

Thus Pascal's Apology ended much nearer the realities of life than his miraculous beginnings would seem to allow. As has been well said, their correspondence with the facts of human nature seemed to him to constitute the value of the supernatural element in Christianity rather than simply to prove its truth. And on one important point—the doctrine that Christ did not die for all men—he had openly tried to wrest Jansen's theological formalism into conformity with the lessons of experience. But would he have gone

[1] *Pens.* 437.

farther along this path, and reduced the rest of the miraculous side of Christianity into a symbolical representation of states of human consciousness? There is no telling; for time and opportunity played him false. While he was at work on his Apology, the forces of Catholicism had been gathering round Port Royal; and the beleaguered garrison was forced to forego all thought of farther progress in a desperate effort to retain what had been already won. Under Mazarin the Jansenists had been safe from serious molestation, for the Cardinal was no fanatic. As Mme. de Motteville said—he loved no virtue and he hated no vice; to him theological rights and wrongs were no more than counters in the diplomatic game. But Mazarin was near his end; after Louis XIV's marriage in 1660 he left the Sovereign of twenty-two to be his own Prime Minister. Louis had strong personal reasons for detesting the Jansenists. He never forgot how, as a boy of ten, he had been forced to fly before the Frondeurs; and Port Royal had always been on friendly terms with the head and front of Frondist offending.

This was the famous Cardinal de Retz, a prince of the Church still stranger than Mazarin himself. The Archbishopric of Paris being almost hereditary in his family, he had long ago been made coadjutor to his uncle, the reigning prelate; and had seized on the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the Jansenists. Not that he cared a fig for their doctrines; he said that all tradition was on the side of Port Royal, and all common sense on that of Escobar. But anything in the shape of a party appealed to his intriguing soul; and it tickled his cynical humour, that he, the most dissolute of men, should stand well with the austerest Christians in France. This curious alliance continued after the Fronde's collapse drove the coadjutor into exile, and the richer Jansenists contributed largely to the fugitive's support. Not that their charity was

altogether disinterested. On his uncle's death, in 1654, Retz had succeeded to the Archbishopric, although Mazarin would not let him set foot within his see, and tried hard to make him resign. But resign he would not; so long as he remained canonical Archbishop he could always irritate the Court, and reward his supporters by appointing vicars-general friendly to their interests. Hence to strike at Port Royal was to strike at him, and Louis did not long stay his hand. In December, 1660, he urged the Assembly of the clergy to take immediate steps for putting an end to Jansenism; and in February, 1661, the Assembly decided to revive the Formulary, from which the resistance of the judges had delivered France four years before. Every priest, monk, and nun in the kingdom was to declare that he 'condemned with heart and mouth the doctrine of Cornelius Jansen.'

The news threw not only consternation, but division, into the Jansenist camp. The most moderate were for immediate submission, the stalwarts for open resistance. Their case was well argued by the Abbé Perrault, a brother of the adversary of Boileau. He maintained that the imposition of the Formulary was a greater scandal than the condemnation of Jansen; to sign it was implicitly to admit that the ecclesiastical authorities had a right to lay on conscience any burden that they chose. The moderate men objected that the Pope and Bishops were infallible. Perrault replied that they were not; the Church's true infallibility resided in the mass of Christian men who had often victoriously withstood their chief pastors to the face. Such was the natural consequence of a doctrine of individual inspiration. What could infallibility be but the united utterance of spiritual sense? 'God does not ordinarily work miracles in the conduct of His Church,' wrote Pascal. 'It would be a surpassing miracle if infallibility were in the hands of a single man; whereas nothing could be

more in order than that it should rest with the multitude. God hides His providence under nature here, as in His other works.'[1] The moderate men answered that such reasoning led straight to schism; and the 'disciples of St. Augustine' had always been foremost in preserving the unity of the Church. Perrault retorted that there were two kinds of unity. One was an inward bond of charity; the other was an external legal chain. The early Christians had only known the first; but during the last twelve centuries it had been slowly ousted by the second. St. Paul always compared the Church to a human body; but the living organism had stiffened into a pallid, mathematical figure. Christians were become mere radii of a circle, and the only bond of unity left them was that of meeting in a common centre at Rome.

Such was precisely the character that Ultramontanism, acting in concert with history, had foisted on the Roman Church. But even Perrault could not draw the moral of his own conclusions. For the ecclesiasticism that produced the Formulary he cared no more than Pascal himself. 'When St. Peter and the Apostles were considering whether they should abolish circumcision, which was commanded by the Law, they did not ask what was written in the Prophets, but only whether the Gentile converts had received the Holy Ghost. For they thought that God cared more for those whom He had filled with His Spirit than about a strict observance of the Law.'[2] Could anyone pretend that the papal patrons of Escobar were filled with the Spirit of God? Clearly not, and the Jansenists accordingly made light of their authority. But, although they completely threw over the idea of the Church as the supreme legislative authority, they could not throw over the Church considered as the palpable representative on earth of the Redeemer. Augustine had stamped far too deeply on their

[1] *Pens.* 876. [2] *Pens.* 672.

minds his conception of the Mystical Body, wherein Jesus Christ became perpetually re-incarnate, generation after generation. And Augustine's theology seemed borne out by experience. Port Royal might admit that, in the matter of conversion, the wind bloweth where it listeth; but it also held that 'exterior practices accustom us to interior virtues.' Grace flowed in most abundantly through certain definite channels, the mass, the sacraments, ascetic exercises, common prayer; and all these channels were under the control of the Church. 'I am present to thee by my word in the Scriptures, by my spirit in the Church and inspirations, by my power in the priesthood, by my prayer in the faithful.'

Here lies the secret of Port Royal's quibbling incertitude. Pascal and his friends might be willing enough to face the prospect of excommunication; they dared not take the first step themselves, and openly break loose from Rome. 'Perhaps they will cut us off from the Church,' wrote Jacqueline, but they cannot cut us off from Jesus Christ so long as our Charity remains alive. If we only grieve in silence, without setting up altar against altar, Charity will keep us inviolably bound to the Church.' That being so, Jansenism was doomed. The world recks little of reformers who are content to grieve in silence. Its ear is only caught by those who dare not only to set up altar against altar, but to defend their sanctuary by force of arms, with 'weapons forged in the shop of war by armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth.' For all its purity the blood of Port Royal altogether lacked the iron that goes to make a Luther or a John Knox. 'Truth does not ask men to receive her, only to endure her,' was the heart-broken war-cry with which Isaac de Saci strengthened the knees of his flock. So far from rousing thoughts of resistance, the approach of persecution was welcomed as 'the surest mark of piety,' the crowning favour from on High. At last the Jansenists were worthy to be tried in the Refiner's

fire. God stood ready with His fan to winnow the wheat from the chaff. Then, too, it was fitting, as Fontaine said, that Grace should be defended in the same way as it came into the world. The feebler its upholders, the more desperate their present straits, the more clearly their eventual triumph would be due to God alone.

This line of argument was the more natural, since the brunt of persecution fell on the nuns of Port Royal. The leading Jansenist clerics were already in hiding, and laymen were not compelled to subscribe the Formulary at all. But what would the nuns do? Drilled in Antoine Arnauld's distinction of law and fact—that the Church was infallible on an abstract point of doctrine, but fallible on deciding on the merits of any individual author—most of them were willing to sign, provided that this distinction was expressly recognised; but they refused to swear, on the strength of an admittedly fallible utterance of the Church, that certain propositions were contained in a book written in a language which they could not read. However, the Vicars-General of the fugitive Archbishop made things easy for them. In June, 1661, they put forward the Formulary prefaced by a Pastoral Letter, which distinctly required no more than a 'respectful silence' for the point of fact. Arnauld and the party-leaders accordingly begged the nuns to sign, and most of them obeyed. But Jacqueline Pascal and a few of the more scrupulous held out; a sister of the assailant of the casuists could not lightly fall in with methods which 'consented to a lie, although without exactly denying the truth.' And they found some outside supporters. Perrault declared that the restricted signature took back in one breath all that it gave in another; it was like making a deed of gift of the whole of one's property, except one's real and personal estate. These things weighed heavily on Jacqueline's mind. 'She dreaded the very shadow of evil,' says her biographer; 'and in a very outspoken letter to

M. Arnauld she explained how much she feared lest the iniquity of the Formulary should betray her into courses ill befitting Christian frankness, and how ready she was to suffer anything, rather than fail in bearing witness to the truth. But her scruples were presently overcome; she signed, although with great reluctance. For she was torn in two between the wish to submit, and the feeling that here submission was out of place. These anxieties undermined her health, and she fell grievously ill. On October 4, 1661, she died, thus being the first victim of the signature.'

Jacqueline's sacrifice was all to no purpose. The ink on her pen was scarcely dry, before the French Council of State censured the Pastoral, and the Pope condemned it. At the end of October, the Vicars-General put forward a new Pastoral, demanding unconditional acceptance of the Formulary. Thereupon arose new dissensions within the Jansenist camp, into which Jacqueline's brother was presently dragged. Pascal had spent most of 1660 at Clermont with the Périers. There he was brought much into the company of his fellow-Jansenist and fellow-townsman, Jean Domat, the Blackstone—and something more than the Blackstone—of France. The commentator of the laws of England only taught jurisprudence to speak the language of the scholar and the gentleman; but Domat also excelled in the power of disentangling legal first principles from their haphazard embodiment in a statute. Such a man was well fitted to help Pascal in steering a way through the tortuous mazes of Jansenist polemic. What exactly was at stake? Antoine Arnauld narrowed the whole issue down to the question of the 'Augustinus.' He told his followers to accept whatever the authorities put before them, so long as they did not expressly repudiate Jansen. He even urged the nuns to sign the Formulary, though with a rider to the effect that they did not profess to judge of matters beyond the competence of their sex.

Arnauld's rider obliquely suggested the distinction of law and fact; and to Pascal and Domat it seemed a subterfuge equally useless and unworthy. They argued that the real question was not whether the Pope had been unjust to Jansen: it was whether he had condemned the true doctrine of Grace. The Jesuits were not at war with the 'Augustinus' for its own sake; they attacked it because it was the accepted symbol of a conception of religion—a religion of conversion and spiritual sense, of thunder-claps and visible upsets of Grace—which they were anxious to destroy. For this purpose they had engineered the Formulary; and therefore anyone who signed it, without excepting Jansen's name from censure of any kind, was acting in a way 'abominable before God, craven in the sight of man, and of no service whatever to those already marked out for destruction.' Nor did Pascal scruple to withstand his leaders to the face. Thus Margaret Périer records how Arnauld, Nicole, and other leaders of the party met at her uncle's house one day in November, 1661, to discuss the question of the Formulary. Arnauld and Nicole argued that the nuns ought to sign, Pascal that they ought not. 'Each side having had its say, all those present decided in favour of M. Arnauld and Nicole. M. Pascal loved truth above all things; he was disabled by a headache that never left him; he had strained every nerve to make his friends feel what he felt himself, and had spoken with great energy in spite of his weakness. At the result he was overcome with pain; his voice left him, and he sank down in a swoon. The whole company was startled, and hastened to apply restoratives. After a while the others retired, leaving him alone with M. de Roannez and M. Domat, Mme. Périer, and her son.'

The breach, however, was short in duration. In the spring of 1662, Retz came to terms with the Court. He resigned the Archbishopric; the commission of his Vicars-General automatically determined, and his successor

insisted on a signature without any restrictions at all. This no Jansenist could approve, and Arnauld and Nicole found themselves once more shoulder to shoulder with Pascal. Indeed, their temporary estrangement would have had no importance whatever, had it not led to an unfortunate misunderstanding after Pascal's death. The priest who attended him in his last hours was a certain Abbé Beurrier, a good Churchman, but no great admirer of the Jesuits, and therefore anxious to make things easy for the author of the Provincial Letters. Having heard that Pascal rejected the distinction of law and fact, he concluded—or perhaps diplomatically chose to assume—that he must have done so on orthodox Catholic grounds, and therefore forebore to question the dying man about his beliefs. Nay, such was his zeal for his penitent's posthumous reputation, that he publicly declared that Pascal's death-bed was free from all taint of Jansenism. His assertions were refuted at length by Mme. Périer and other friends, but perhaps their most striking disproof is furnished by her daughter. Margaret relates that her uncle was asked whether he regretted having written the Provincial Letters. He answered that, if he had had the work to do over again, he would have written still more strongly. When he said these words, however, the time for strong language was past. The sands in his hour-glass were almost run, and the few weeks of life still left him would be spent in mystic colloquies with his Redeemer.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE END

'WITHOUT Jesus Christ, man must needs be sunk in malice and wretchedness; with Jesus Christ he is freed from malice and wretchedness. In Him is all our happiness and virtue. Apart from Him all is vice and misery, error, darkness, death, despair.'[1] Pascal's whole religion centred in his conversion, in the triumph of 'things invisible, but real' over 'things visible, but vain.' This triumph he could not ascribe to any strength of his own: to what, then, was it due? Theology pointed to the Atonement wrought by Jesus Christ. But Pascal could not rest content with 'one oblation once offered' many hundred years ago. If Redemption was to be a living reality it must not be thought of as a bare historical fact. Calvary and the Resurrection must symbolise the spiritual upheaval that took place, whenever a Christian died to his *Moi*, and awoke to a new life of righteousness. 'A God humbled, even to the death of the Cross; a Messiah triumphing over death by death. Two natures in Jesus Christ, two Comings, two stages in the nature of man.'[2] But Redemption was not only concerned with the actual crisis of conversion. Did not Jansen teach that God was the Author of all good, and that good only came to man through the medicinal Grace of Christ the Saviour? 'All Faith is summed up in Jesus Christ and Adam, and all morality in concupiscence

[1] *Pens.* 546. [2] *Pens.* 765.

and Grace.' Christ and Adam typefied the eternal conflict between right and wrong. 'Like Nature, Grace will be always in the world, and thus in a certain sense it is natural. Hence there will be always Pelagians and Catholics, and always a conflict between them; because their first birth makes the one, and the Grace of a second birth makes the other.' [1]

Such was the natural state of beings afloat in mid-ocean between two opposite infinities. How could they enter into fellowship with the Divine? Pascal's Protestant contemporaries had already found an answer. 'Lutheranism,' writes Principal Fairbairn, 'attempts to establish a kind of equation between the ideas of God and man. The person of Christ is a symbol of humanity; in it man can so participate as to share its perfections and its dignity. God lives in Christ now openly, now cryptically, but ever really. And His humanity so penetrates the Deity as to make Him with a feeling of our infirmities, and make Him a partaker in our lot.' Impressive as this standpoint is, it is also fraught with no slight danger. Once make Redemption into the sum-total of all the forces working for good in the world, and the personality of Jesus fades automatically out of sight. He is no longer flesh and blood; He no longer heartens men with the force of a living example; He vanishes into an abstract, all-embracing pattern of what humanity should be. As Paul Wernle says, He becomes like that appalling phantom of the older psychologists, where the four cardinal characters are melted into one. Time alone is required to resolve Him into some impersonal 'stream of tendency, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness.' With such a Deity there can be no thought of unrestrained communion. He can only be approached along a carefully macadamised path; and Port Royal accordingly set itself to work out an elaborate technique of salvation,

[1] *Pens.* 521.

based on the imitation of Christ. 'It is one of the great principles of Christianity,' wrote Pascal in 1651, after a first reading of the 'Augustinus,' 'that all that took place in Jesus Christ must take place again in the body and soul of every Christian. As Jesus Christ suffered and died to this mortal life, rose again, ascended to heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, so our body and soul must suffer and die, rise again, ascend to heaven, and sit at the right hand of God.'[1]

Still, Pascal soon passed beyond so schematic a presentment of the 'Imitatio Christi.' He must enter into personal relations with his Redeemer. He must force Jesus Christ to say to him: 'I thought of thee in My agony; I shed this drop of blood for thee.' Jesus, indeed, would still remain the universal mirror of perfection; but Pascal thought that its unshaded glare was too much for human eye-sight. The light of the head was most serviceable, when it was broken up into a thousand facets, and refracted through the members. 'I consider Jesus Christ in all persons, and in ourselves. I consider Him as a Father in His Father, as a Brother in His brethren, as poor in the poor, as rich in the rich, as a Doctor and Priest in priests, as a Prince in princes. By His glory He is all that is great; by His mortal life He is all that is mean and small. That is why He took upon Himself our unhappy condition, that He might live in all men and be the model of every state.'[2] Every day Pascal laid fresh stress on the human qualities in Jesus. 'He is a God Whom we approach without pride, and under Whom we humble ourselves without despair.'[3] 'The Jews, while inquiring whether He was God, discovered that He was a man.'[4] 'Jesus Christ said great things so simply that He hardly seemed to have thought of them, and yet so clearly that it was easy to see *what* He thought

[1] Letter to his sister Gilberte of October 17, 1651, *Works*, ii. p. 25.
[2] *Pens.* 785. [3] *Pens.* 528. [4] *Pens.* 763.

of them.'[1] 'Who taught the Evangelists to paint a perfectly heroic soul that they succeed so well with Jesus Christ? Why do they make Him so weak in His agony? Cannot they picture constancy in death? Yes, for St. Luke makes St. Stephen more steadfast than Jesus Christ.'[2]

This last passage strikes a truly Jansenist note. Was it not fraught with a message of exceeding comfort for the victims of the Formulary? Might they not feel that they came closer to Jesus in proportion as they 'grieved in silence' under persecution? Such is the burden of that wonderful 'Mystery of Jesus,' a little meditation on the Mount of Olives, now incorporated with the 'Pensées.'

> Jesus is in a garden. But it is not the garden of delights, where the first Adam lost himself and the whole human race. It is a garden of pain, where He saved Himself and the whole human race.
>
> Jesus seeks comfort from His three dearest friends, but they are asleep. He begs them watch awhile with Him, but their compassion for Him is so small that they cannot even keep awake. Thus Jesus is left to bear the wrath of God alone. None feel or share His agony; none know it, but Heaven and Himself.
>
> I think this is the only time that Jesus ever complained. Now He burst forth, as though He could no longer bear the burden of His grief: 'My soul is sorrowful unto death.'
>
> Jesus seeks company and consolation from men: that seems to me unique. But He does not find it, for His disciples are asleep. Jesus has prayed to men, and has not been heard.
>
> Jesus will be in an agony until the end of the world; all that time we must not sleep.[3]

Such was the abiding thought of Pascal's last few months

[1] *Pens.* 797. [2] *Pens.* 800. [3] *Pens.* 553.

on earth. 'His disorders continuing upon him without a moment's intermission,' says Gilberte Périer,[1] 'reduced him to such a state that he was not able to set about any kind of work, or to see hardly anyone. But although his malady prevented his being serviceable to the public or his friends, it was not without use to himself; and he underwent it with such tranquillity and patience that there is reason to think that God by this means was pleased to render him just such as He would have him appear at the Last Day. For during all this long illness he always bore in mind these two great maxims: a renunciation of all pleasure and of all superfluity. In the very height of his distemper he kept a perpetual watch over his senses, absolutely refusing them whatever gave them pleasure. And when necessity constrained him to do something that might afford him some sort of satisfaction, he had a wonderful address in disengaging his mind from having a share in it. For example, his continual diseases obliging him to feed upon delicacies, he took the utmost care not to relish what he ate; and at the very beginning of his retreat he laid down stated rules concerning all his future meals. Let his appetite be what it would, he never went beyond his appointed portion; and whatever distaste he had for his food, he forced himself to eat what he thought was fit. And when he was asked why he laid such a constraint upon himself, he answered that it was necessary to satisfy the demands of the stomach, but not those of the appetite.

'He had so great a love for poverty that he kept it always in his thoughts; so that when he went about any undertaking, or if anybody wanted his advice, the first thought that came into his head was to consider whether there was any room for practising the true spirit of poverty. He could not endure that people should study how to have

[1] This translation is based upon the *Life of M. Pascal* by the Nonjuror William Andrews (London, 1744).

everything in readiness and convenient about them. He said that nothing was so likely to extinguish the spirit of poverty as that nice attention to our comforts, and that decorum which makes us desire the best of everything from the best maker of it. And he said, in regard to artificers, that we should always choose the poorest and most honest, and not hunt after that excellence which is never necessary, nor ever can be useful. Sometimes he would break out: "Oh that my heart was as poor as my mind. Then indeed I should be happy, for I am thoroughly persuaded that poverty is a long step towards salvation."

'His charity towards the poor was always very great, but towards the latter end of his life he redoubled it. He said that it was the universal vocation of all Christians, and that there was no need of any particular mark to know if one had a call to it from Above, because this was incontestably the very mark upon which Jesus Christ would judge the world; and that if we well considered that the omission of this one virtue might be the cause of our damnation, that thought alone would suffice to make us deprive ourselves of all that we had if we could but have a proper notion of faith. Also he told us that frequenting the poor was extremely advantageous, since a continual prospect of their miseries was enough of itself to make the hardest heart deprive itself of all useless luxuries. About three months before his death he gave very palpable proof of his goodness of heart. As he was returning from Mass at the church of Saint Sulpice, a very beautiful young girl about fifteen came up to him to ask an alms. He was troubled to see her exposed to so evident a danger, and asked her who she was, and how she came to be obliged to beg. Having learnt that she came from the country, that her father was dead, and that her sick mother had been that very day taken to the Hôtel Dieu Hospital, he thought that God had sent her to him at the very moment she became necessitous. So he

took her to the Seminary, where he placed her in the hands of a good priest. Next day he sent a woman to buy her clothes and whatever else was necessary to fit her to go into some lady's service. The priest asked the woman the charitable gentleman's name. She answered that she had no commission to tell him, but that she would come from time to time to provide for the girl's necessities.

'His purity was equal to his charity. He had so great a regard for this virtue that he was always on his guard to prevent either himself or others from breaking in upon it. It is incredible how exact he was upon this point; I really stood in awe of him myself. If accidentally I said that I had seen a handsome woman, it made him angry, and he would tell me that such discourses should never be held before servants or young people, because I could not know what strange ideas I might be putting in their heads. He could not bear to see my children caress me, and said that one might show one's tenderness in a thousand other ways. Not but what he had for us an extraordinary affection, though the vivacity of his temperament made him sometimes impatient and difficult to please. But the instant he was told, or himself perceived, that he had put anyone out of humour, he made amends for it by such a courteous behaviour and so many good offices that he never lost anyone's friendship. But his affection never went so far as a complete attachment. Of this he gave lively proof at my sister's death, which happened about ten months before his own. When he first heard the news, he only said: "May God grant that we make so good an end." Nor did he afterwards mention the matter, except to reflect on the singular favour God had shown my sister during her lifetime, and especially in choosing that particular moment to call her to Himself. All this often made him say: "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord." When he saw how much I

grieved over her loss he chid me severely, and told me that I did ill to be troubled over the death of the righteous; rather ought I to praise and bless God for having so immensely recompensed the little services she had done Him in her lifetime. This shows that he had no worldly attachment to those he loved; for, had he been capable of having one, it would certainly have been to my sister, since she was undeniably the person he loved most in the world. But he was equally determined to prevent other persons having an attachment to him. I was quite surprised at the checks he would sometimes give me, and I complained to my sister that he was unkind, and that I seemed to put him in pain at the very moment when I was trying hardest to please him. She assured me that I was entirely mistaken, and that she knew he had as great an affection for me as I could wish. And indeed, when an occasion presented itself to make me want some assistance from my brother, he embraced that opportunity with so much care and tenderness that he left me no room to doubt his having a great love for me. After his death we found that this principle had entered very deeply into his heart; for, in order to keep it ever before his eyes, he had written it down on a little piece of paper, whereon were these words: "It is unjust to let anyone become attached to me. I should be deceiving my neighbour, because I am not the ultimate end of anyone, nor have I wherewithal to give him satisfaction. Am I not bordering on death? And will not the object of his affection perish with me? Thus I should be as blameworthy, if I made myself beloved, as if I told a falsehood. Nay, I am bound to warn men against having an attachment for me, and to tell them that their one and only care should be the search for, and service of God." [1]

'Throughout life a wonderful simplicity appeared in him, and made him most punctual in everything he did,

[1] *Pens.* 471.

wherever religion was concerned. During the last four years of his life, as he could not employ himself about any work, his chief diversion was to go about visiting the churches where relics were exposed, or where any solemnity was being celebrated; and he had a church-almanac to instruct him at what places any particular devotions were to be performed. About two months before his death he did a very remarkable act of charity. He had in his house a good, honest man, with his wife and family, to whom he gave a room and a supply of firing. All this he did out of charity; for he drew no other advantage from their presence than that of not being left quite alone in his house. This good man's son falling ill of the small-pox, my brother, who needed my assistance, feared that I should be under some apprehension of coming to the house. But, as he thought that the sick boy could not be moved without danger, he chose to leave the house himself, although he was so very ill. On June 29, 1662, he came to us, and returned home no more. Within three days he was seized with a violent colic, which entirely deprived him of sleep. During his illness he edified and surprised all those about him by his admirable patience. When he saw that any of them were afflicted at his excruciating pains, he would say: "Do not be so concerned for me. Sickness is the natural state of a Christian; because it places us where we ought always to be, in a state of suffering deprived of all the pleasures of the senses, exempt from all those passions which work upon us as long as we live, and in a continual expectation of death. Is it not thus that Christians ought to pass their lives? Is it not a great happiness to be forced by necessity into the state in which we ought to be, and to have nothing else to do than humbly and peacefully to submit to it?"

'He was extremely anxious to receive the Communion; but the physicians opposed this, saying that he could not communicate fasting, and that to receive the Sacrament

by way of a Viaticum, one must be in imminent danger of death. But upon the 6th of August he was seized with great giddiness and pains in the head, and besought the physicians with incredible eagerness to let him receive the Communion. When they still refused, he said: 'Since I may not communicate with the Head, I would communicate with Him through His members. For this reason I have thought of having a poor sick man brought in hither, that he should have the same nursing and attendance as I have, and that there should be no difference made between him and me.' I sent immediately to the curate, who answered that he knew of no sick person fit to be moved, but that, as soon as my brother was well, he would give him an old man to take care of for the rest of his life; for at that time the curate had not the least doubt of my brother's recovery. When he saw that he could not have a sick man in the house, he begged me to have him carried to the hospital for incurables, because he had a great wish to die in the company of the poor. Meanwhile the physicians still assured him that he was in no manner of danger. But on August 16 I found him so very ill that I gave private orders for wax-candles and all that was requisite for his receiving the Communion. These preparations were useful sooner than we had imagined. About midnight he was seized with so violent a convulsive fit that we gave him over for dead, and were much concerned to see him die without the Sacrament, after having so long and so earnestly desired it. But God, as a recompense, miraculously suspended his convulsion, when the curate entered the room with the Sacrament, crying out: "Behold, here is He Whom you have so earnestly desired." These words roused him quite; he summoned all his strength, and raised himself half-way up in the bed. When he had received the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, he said: "May God never

forsake me." These were his last words ; almost immediately after he was seized with violent convulsions, which continued to the end. Within twenty-four hours he breathed his last, on August 19, 1662, at one o'clock in the morning, being of the age of thirty-nine years and two months.'

Of late years a great change has come over the popular estimate of Pascal. Old-fashioned critics used to lament that a heaven-born leader of thought should have thrown himself into the arms of a ' Jansenist phrontistery '—as one of his scientific correspondents called Port Royal—and they accounted for his aberrations by fits of recurrent neurasthenia. Nowadays it is recognised that his mental development was as clear and unbroken as Spinoza's own. At the Paris Club he was taught to believe in the reign of universal law. ' All things are caused and causes, acted on and agents, and all are bound together by a natural and invisible chain, that links the farthest and the most unlike.'[1] But how was man to put his finger on this chain ? Descartes undertook to reach it by *a priori* deduction from certain metaphysical first principles. But Pascal and the younger members of the Paris Club declared that, in physical matters, experiment should be their only master. The Cartesian conclusions they decried as at once ' useless and uncertain.' They were uncertain because there was no saying whether they were based on genuine observation, or whether they were mere ' fanciful endeavours to slake man's curiosity as to the Unknown ' thrown out in the interests of a theory. They were useless because even true facts lost their savour once the spirit of abstract systematisation had worked its will upon them. ' One might as well shut them up in a box, as hide them away behind a general principle. It is only in their primitive heterogeneous state that they have any meaning for us.' [2] Was, then, the

[1] *Pens.* 72. [2] *Pens.* 20.

ultimate explanation of things altogether beyond our grasp? As a whole, it was; Descartes came no nearer the truth than the veriest scholastic wind-bag lecturing *de omni scibili*. On the other hand, however, 'Nature imitates herself'; and Pascal's own researches into the equilibrium of liquids taught him that her analogies abound in the most divergent quarters. But experience also showed him that the laws of Nature cannot be thought of as distinct from the phenomena of Nature. She hides her secrets in the concrete facts, much as she hides her kernels in a nut. And nothing but long and careful observation of these facts will avail to crack her husks.

If this were true of science, it was still more true in the domain of social life. The Chevalier de Méré's business was to turn out excellent workmen of good breeding; and naturally his first impulse had been to boil down the leading principles of manners into a code capable of being explained in manuals of etiquette. But manners obstinately refused to condense themselves into a code. Méré had sorrowfully to admit that neither rules, nor maxims, nor even science, turned out good labourers or great men. Nay, the Duchess of Lesdiguières was the best-bred woman of her time, just because she 'sent away art and study,' and handled social problems as they arose, without any settled principle at all. And Méré must needs admit that she was right in thus forestalling a celebrated saying of Immanuel Kant. There was no such thing as good breeding, apart from well-bred actions. Easy as it was to pass judgment on this or that piece of conduct, it was impossible to catch the Spirit of Manners unawares, and imprison it in a formula. Now stepped forward Miton and Montaigne to show that the same rule applied to matters more important than good breeding. Did anyone seriously suppose that the essence of truth or justice could be embodied in an abstract definition? 'These things,' cries Pascal, 'are so delicate that our clumsy

instruments never quite manage to reach them. If they blunder on to the point, they mangle it; or else they scratch about all round it, more often in the wrong place than the right.'[1] Was, then, the search for truth and justice a delusion? By no means, provided only that men would give up the hopeless quest of logical order and completeness, and trust to the spontaneous impulse of the moment. Very soon these impulses were hypostatised into a mysterious Law of Nature, which Pierre Charron declared to be the candle of our Maker lighted in every breast. 'Why then, vain man, dost thou trouble to look abroad for a rule? To what purpose is all this tumbling over codes and institutes? The Two Tables of Moses, the Twelve Tables of Rome, the Law written in the hearts of those who have no law, are but copies of that Original, which thou keepest close within thee.' In short, man's best guide was the intuitions of an unsophisticated conscience; only when he wished to cheat it did he fly to authorities and arguments. That is why Pascal classes the 'logicians' with heretics, thieves, and Mohammedan soldiers, as criminals who have broken through every law of God and man, the more exactly to obey some mad code of their own devising.

But what was the content of Charron's Original? What was meant by 'following Nature?' Libertines answered the question according to their several temperaments. Charron, whose eclectic spirit combined a lively reverence for Du Vair with devotion to Montaigne, was anxious to 'found on man the greatness of man' on lines suggested by the 'Sainte Philosophie.' But most Libertines condemned the methods of Du Vair as alike 'difficult and vain.' They said that following Nature meant keeping to the line of least resistance—always doing what one liked, for no other reason than because one liked it; and never trying, *instar Sisyphi nixandi*, to turn oneself into something other than

[1] *Pens.* 82.

one was by birth. And Montaigne and Saint Évremond gave this principle a tolerably wide extension.

> There 's nothing new,
> And there 's nothing true,
> And it doesn't matter at all,

was the practical outcome of their philosophy. But were they right? Did men always feel so much enamoured of the line of least resistance? Were there not moments, even in a commonplace life, when they were tempted *instar Sisyphi nixari*—when the 'gloomy nymph of Stoic virtue' seemed more attractive than the cheerful madcap of Montaigne? Such, at least, was Pascal's experience. 'Our soul is the theatre of an endless war between reason and the passions. Some have tried to crush their passions, and become as gods; others have wished to stifle their reason, and live like brute beasts. But they have none of them succeeded. Reason remains as an accusing spirit, to harass the peace of those who give way to their passions; and the passions still keep alive in those most anxious to renounce them.' [1]

Still, was it not possible to do as the Jesuits did, and strike a judicious balance between the two? Did not casuistry contrive to 'leave the passions their sustenance,' and at the same time bring them under the control of reason? No. The very idea of compromise always stank in Pascal's nostrils; and here he also had the 'Augustinus' at hand, to show that compromise on moral questions meant coupling Jesus Christ with Belial.' Far better the open impiety of Montaigne than the trimming of these heirs of Pontius Pilate. 'The false justice of Pilate only made Jesus Christ suffer the more; for he scourged Him in obedience to his false justice, and afterwards killed Him. It would have been better to have killed Him outright. But that is the way of the false brethren. They do a good work,

[1] *Pens.* 413.

and then they do a bad, to show that they are not altogether on the side of Jesus Christ, for they are ashamed of Him. Then comes some great temptation, and they kill Him.'[1] Nor was this the language of a mere intemperate enthusiast. Excellent as Escobar's intentions may have been, there cannot be two opinions about the unsavouriness of his methods. They were the very consecration of the legalism—the 'tumbling over codes and institutes'—which Pascal's Libertine masters had taught him to abominate. And in the train of legal methods came an unholy crop of legal fictions. As a Catholic, Escobar was bound to believe that 'the rules of the Gospel in all their severity' were God's conditions of salvation; as a casuist and a practical man, he knew that there was no chance of getting the mass of his fellows to observe them. How escape from the dilemma? Clearly by showing that keeping the Law of God in name was a very different thing from keeping it in reality. For the sake of appearances, He might ask for His twenty shillings in the pound; in practice He was a most accommodating creditor, always willing to take a small dividend in full satisfaction of His claims. And the Church always knew exactly what rebate He was ready to make; in His Name it denounced, as Pharisees and hypocrites, those who thought that its terms were pitched too low. For was it not infallible? And had it not at hand the limitless resources of the Sacrament and the keys, which, as Father Nouet says, 'make up what is wanting in an interior moving'? No wonder if Pascal's Jesuit could boast that his Society never refused any man, be he what he might. But those who cared more for the substance than the shadow of religion might be pardoned if they saw in these Escobarine morals something like a 'killing of Jesus Christ.'

All thought of a compromise between reason and the passions thus falling to the ground, it became clear that the

[1] *Pens.* 791.

only chance of peace lay in helping one side or the other to a decisive victory. But how could either of the rivals crush the other out of existence? The passions could not stifle reason; reason could not master the passions, despite all that Descartes and Du Vair might say about using art and industry to govern them. 'Thus our heart is torn in two between what is real, but absent, and what is present, but vain; and thereon follows confusion and disorder.' From this confusion man's own efforts could not save him; if deliverance came to him at all, it must come through the grace of God. So much Pascal learnt from Jansen during his first conversion at Rouen. But the first conversion was an affair of theories and books; it was not until a certain fateful night in November, 1654, that Pascal began to see what conversion really meant. Aided by a thunder-clap of Grace, reason then definitely put the passions to flight; and the rest of Pascal's life was spent in completing the work begun at conversion, by feverishly stamping out the few remaining relics of his *Moi*. Carcavi and Roberval might bemoan his disappearance into a 'phrontistery'; but, for such a nature as his, there was no choice between Port Royal and a madhouse. At all costs he must set his mind at unity with itself, and the violence of the means employed attests the herculean difficulty of the task. Men of normal temperament do not consider that a sick-bed is the best place for a Christian, or that marriage is the lowest state to which he can descend; and, if they seriously tried to put these precepts into practice, they would soon realise the truth of Pascal's saying that those who try to live as angels generally end as beasts. But men of abnormal temperament often must needs grasp at remedies undreamed of in our commonplace philosophy. No doubt, it is painful to think of Pascal solemnly proving to his sister that she ought not to be fond of him; but to follow the lead of his Catholic critics, and put these excesses down to the count of

the 'Augustinus,' is to confuse the ailment with its cure. Pascal himself told Charlotte de Roannez that her spiritual trials did not spring so much from her present piety as from the relics of a past impiety. In like manner it might be said that his own asceticism was not due to his present religion so much as to the survivals of a former morbidly divided self. Jansenism found him consciously torn in half, inferior, and unhappy; it left him consciously unified, superior, and happy.

Thenceforward Pascal dwelt unceasingly on the healing powers of religion; it was 'desirable, because it does us good.' Herein lay his great originality as an apologist. Most writers were content to argue that religion is not incompatible with human nature; Pascal took the bolder step of maintaining that it was true, just because it agreed so well with human nature. Most writers spoke as though Revelation were a collection of mysterious dogmas shot into the world, like a message from Mars, from a sphere utterly unlike our own. Pascal certainly never lost sight of the mysterious element in religion, but he insisted that his contemporaries looked for the mystery in the wrong place. Christianity was not 'supernatural,' because it was unlike our nature: it was so because it made drafts on forces —on 'thunder-claps and visible upsets'—altogether transcending our everyday experience. Of these forces the Gospel was no more than a vividly symbolical presentment. The convert was torn in half between 'things visible, but vain, and things invisible, but real'; theology answered that, during his state of conflict, he had died in Adam. 'Things invisible, but real' gained an eventual victory; theology answered that in Christ the convert had been made alive. Here lay the root of Pascal's quarrel with Catholicism. In an amiable desire to make things easy for everyone, the Church only asked for a bare acceptance of its dogmas. After all, it cost small effort to accept the

main facts of Christian history as what Antoine Arnauld called a merely intellectual exercise; even Garasse's Libertines were willing to do this as a 'piece of tavern civility.' To such belief add moderate church-going and a regular moral life, and anyone could be a tolerable Catholic. Pascal, on the other hand, refused to take these intellectual exercises as a substitute for faith. In themselves, dogmas were as cold and dead as Israel's stone Tables of the Law; if a man wished to make the dry bones live, he must actually go through the psychological crisis, of which the dogmas were a very lame translation. Hence it was absurd to speak as though the bare acceptance of Catholicism was enough of itself to make a man religious; men could only become real Christians, when they already possessed a nature capable of undergoing that crisis. All a creed could do was to give point and unity and purpose to impulses that hitherto had been blindly stirring within them. It stood, in fact, much as dams and sluices stand to the water that flows through them. And what was true of creeds was true of all religious inquiry. Wavering free-thinkers would not wade through the lucubrations of apologists, unless the spirit of Christianity had them already in its grip. 'Console thyself,' says the Redeemer in the 'Mystery of Jesus,' 'thou wouldst not have sought Me, hadst thou not already found Me.'

In other words, the religious impulse was inborn, organic. It could not be artificially grafted on to a man's character; if he came into the world without it, his only chance lay in undergoing the miracle of conversion. Creeds and Churches could no more make him a Christian than they could make him a Shakespeare or an Isaac Newton. For religion was not like a doctrine that could be committed to writing and passed on from one man to another; it was what Pascal calls a line of perspective, a special attitude towards life. Becoming a Christian did not mean simply

undertaking a few more duties, moral and ecclesiastical, than one's unregenerate neighbours practised; it meant organising one's whole experience round one particular centre, seeing the world in one particular light. Hence the need of 'thunder-claps and visible upsets'; for conversion called for a thorough readjustment of all our faculties alike. Aims, that had hitherto seemed supremely important, now seemed supremely unimportant; modes of reasoning, that had hitherto seemed absolutely sure, now appeared as useless and uncertain as Cartesianism itself. 'The first effect of Grace on our soul,' says Pascal, 'is that it views the world and itself from a standpoint altogether new.' Not, indeed, that the struggle was yet over. 'Grace itself is no more than a figure of glory.' The convert must not hope to climb the Mount of Vision at one bound; the loftiest earthly Pisgah would but afford him scant glimpses of the Promised Land. Like his unregenerate fellows, he was still a prisoner of space and time, awash between two opposite Infinities; and life was still an upward struggle. 'God wishes to strengthen our will more than our reason. Perfect clearness would serve the turn of reason, but would slacken the fibres of the will. . . . Man must not be left in utter darkness; but also he must not see enough to think that he already possesses God. He must see just enough to feel that he has lost Him.' [1]

In this conception of the hidden God centre both the Provincial Letters and the 'Pensées.' 'Religion is so great a thing that it is only right that those who will not trouble to seek should be forced to go without it.' But what was the great stumbling-block to an untiring search? Plainly the mistaken conviction that men had already found Him. That was why He wrapped Himself about in mystery. That was why human intelligence, 'talking by the light of Nature,' could not say *what* He was, or even *if* He was at all. In

[1] *Pens.* 556.

particular, that was why He decreed that His creatures should wash to and fro between two opposite Infinities. Thereby a fatal check was put to the self-confidence of philosophers. So long as they believed that they could demonstrate His existence, they would go on evolving fantastic Deities by the score—Gods Stoical, Gods geometrical, Gods fit for carnal Jews. But they only contrived to do this by riding some one single principle—such as dogmatism or scepticism—to the death. To disarm them, no more was needed than to show that God had deliberately so laid out the Universe that no one single principle could cover its entirety. Sooner or later, reason would confound all varieties of dogmatism, and Nature do justice on every kind of sceptic. It was anything but an accident that the premises of Stoics, Pyrrhonists, and the rest were all true, though all their conclusions were false, because the opposite premises were also true.

Still, the hidden God had more ignoble enemies than Descartes and Du Vair. Their errors were at any rate due to hard, if misdirected, thinking; whereas vast numbers of orthodox Catholics had never given five minutes to serious reflexion in their lives. Good, easy-going souls, they had settled accounts up once for all with an infallible ecclesiastical system, and thenceforward thought they knew all they need about religion. Pascal soon tore off the veil from this timorous self-indulgence, masquerading as humble submission of the intellect. 'Men like the Pope to be infallible on questions of Faith, and grave Doctors to be so on questions of morals, so as always to have an assurance close at hand.'[1] Unfortunately, their Maker paid small heed to their inclinations. As Pierre Nicole has explained at length, He thought it better that they should work out their salvation along a path of darkness, doubt, and fear, wherein they were ever dependent on His help. Parch-

[1] *Pens.* 880.

ment certainties were for the Ultramontane legalist, not for the child of the Gospel. Sure as he might be of his calling and election, his conviction never reached the strength of an absolute demonstration; like a fairy-light, it hovered over the outer marches of his mind, vanishing into the mists beyond before reason could overtake it. Hence came the 'trembling faith' of Port Royal. No doubt, as Pascal told Charlotte de Roannez, Christians knew a joy that the world could neither give, nor take away; but there was ever a drop of hyssop in their cup. 'The saints feel this joy without any sorrow; worldlings feel the sorrow without any joy. Christians have the joy mingled with regret at having followed other pleasures in the past, and with fear lest these pleasures may yet beguile them in the future. Let us, then, labour without ceasing to keep the joy that moderates our fear, and to keep the fear that moderates our joy.' [1]

Many critics have shrunk back aghast at this austerity. 'Even the mind of Pascal was not large enough for everything,' [2] says Richard William Church. 'His view of religion rises out of solemn and unfathomable depths, the abyss of life and pain and death, the abyss of sin and ignorance and error, the abyss of redemption and God's love. These themes absorb and dominate his imagination and thoughts; and steadied and controlled as he certainly was by his religion, his book is not one of those which reflect the joy, the quiet order, the peace and exultation of Christian life.' Such golden visions were impossible to one who had undertaken to transpose the great formula of Du Vair, and found on man—not the greatness, but the religion of man. And no one has interpreted more poignantly than Church himself the judgment that Pascal passed upon his race. 'Read man in one way, and he seems made for God and truth.

[1] *Works*, ii. p. 46.
[2] *Pascal, and other Sermons* (1896), p. 5.

Read him in another, and nothing can express the unmeaningness of his life, his blind stumbling through an existence which has come from chance. To look at his great endowments, his wonderful achievements, his never-ceasing progress, he seems indeed the crown and glory of God's creation. But look at the things which he does *not* know, and his vaunts of knowledge seem childish. Look at the things which enchant him, the prejudices which enslave him, the baseness to which he can descend, and is the contempt of the cynic undeserved for so poor a creature? Look at the inevitable fact of death, the decay which precedes it, and is it possible to exaggerate the idle fruitlessness of such a lot, except as a link in an eternal and unfailing chain of fate? So aspiring, so defeated, so undiscouraged; with the strongest impulses to hope, but ever haunted by arguments of despair, he reveals by fits and starts his greater and better nature; but practically, and in the long run, he leads a life which he might lead without God and conscience, guided by calculation of what is pleasant and prudent, calculating rightly in the main, often miscalculating miserably and fatally. There he is, this marvellously compounded creature, crossing and contradicting himself through life; the slave of habits, yet their creator; the slave of imaginations, of which yet he knows the illusions; the slave of opinions, for which he is yet responsible, and which he has contributed to accredit; balancing between good and evil, sin and repentance, till the wavering is cut short by death.'

'The mass of mankind look at all this under the sway of custom and habit; they take it all as it comes, they feel no surprise. But when men try to look below the surface, then come the perplexities and the enigmas. Our instruments of knowledge fail us, or play us false. We are born with the instinct of certainty, and imply it in every act and argument, yet certainty flies from our analysis and verifying tests.

Truth is impossible without freedom of thought; yet no sooner is thought free than it eats away all certainty, till at last it turns upon itself, and surrenders its own consciousness of existence and freedom a prey and sacrifice to a theory. We are distracted between rival claims on our allegiance; between nature and broad common sense and irresistible convictions, and on the other hand the keen, subtle, finished conclusions of the reasoning faculty, apparently so faultless and impregnable in form, often so formidable and ghastly in their consequences. Pascal will explain away nothing, will disguise and ignore nothing. He will put his standard and idea of life as high as Epictetus; but he sees, as clearly as Montaigne, the tricks that custom and imagination play, the treacheries of self-interest, the inconsistencies of goodness, the strange mixture in real life of the ridiculous and the pathetic, the gaps in our logic, the shortcomings of our proofs. He can see but one explanation to the anomalies of our condition. Man's greatness is greatness fallen; it is royal greatness, but the greatness of a disinherited king.'[1]

All honour, therefore, to the man who saw so much and yet did not despair of the Republic. No man knew better than this neurasthenic patient the ghastly reality of physical pain. Yet Pascal continued to declare that man, though a reed, and the feeblest in nature, was a thinking reed. Even when the universe was killing him, his reason still remained its master. But no one knew better than Pascal that this was not the whole of the matter. View reason from one standpoint, and it appeared our tainted nature's solitary boast; slightly change the line of perspective, and—as Pascal roundly says—reason will appear a fool. Yet the mathematician's heart still warmed at the thought of Archimedes. He won no victories; he wore no crown; but oh, how glorious he was to the intellectual

[1] *Pascal and other Sermons* (1896), pp. 7 and 11.

eye. And commoner souls than his could manage to lift the dead-weight of the Universe. 'Despite all the miseries that surround us, and take us by the throat, we cannot get rid of an instinct that still buoys us up.' Nay, the very miseries themselves were evidence of our royal destiny; if man were not a disinherited king, he would not know that he was wretched. To the smug Cartesian, secure in his infallible *Cogito*, doubts and perplexities might seem mere foolishness; to the orthodox Catholic they appeared the terrible consequence of refusing to listen to the Church; to the practical man of the world they were no better than a morbid grubbing in rat-holes. But in Pascal's eyes these troubles were the birth-pangs of conversion, heralding the death of the *Moi* and the dawn of a new, higher life. Men only doubted and stumbled and despaired, because they had lost their hold on 'things visible but vain,' and had not yet found sure footing among 'things invisible, but real.' But they must learn to bear with dimness for a while, for what transcended human consciousness was striving to express itself in terms of human consciousness. Nor need they be discouraged, if their trials awoke no fellow-feeling in the ninety-and-nine just persons, which needed no repentance. What greater blasphemy than to pretend that the touch of the Spirit came to all? 'Recognise the truth of religion in the very obscurity of religion, in the little that we know about it, in our lukewarm wishes to know more.'[1] But converts recked little of the obscurity. They felt that they had come out of the prison of self; they were no longer 'members,' isolated units; they were parts of a larger whole. And that whole was a universal Realm of the Spirit, present within them, yet stretching beyond them changeless and eternal. For it was the land of Truth; and she 'is older than any opinion, and by no means began to be, when she began to be known.'[2]

[1] *Pens.* 565. [2] *Fragment d'un Traité du Vide*, *Works*, III. p. 162.

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